OTHER WORLDS SCIENCE STORIES

March 1952

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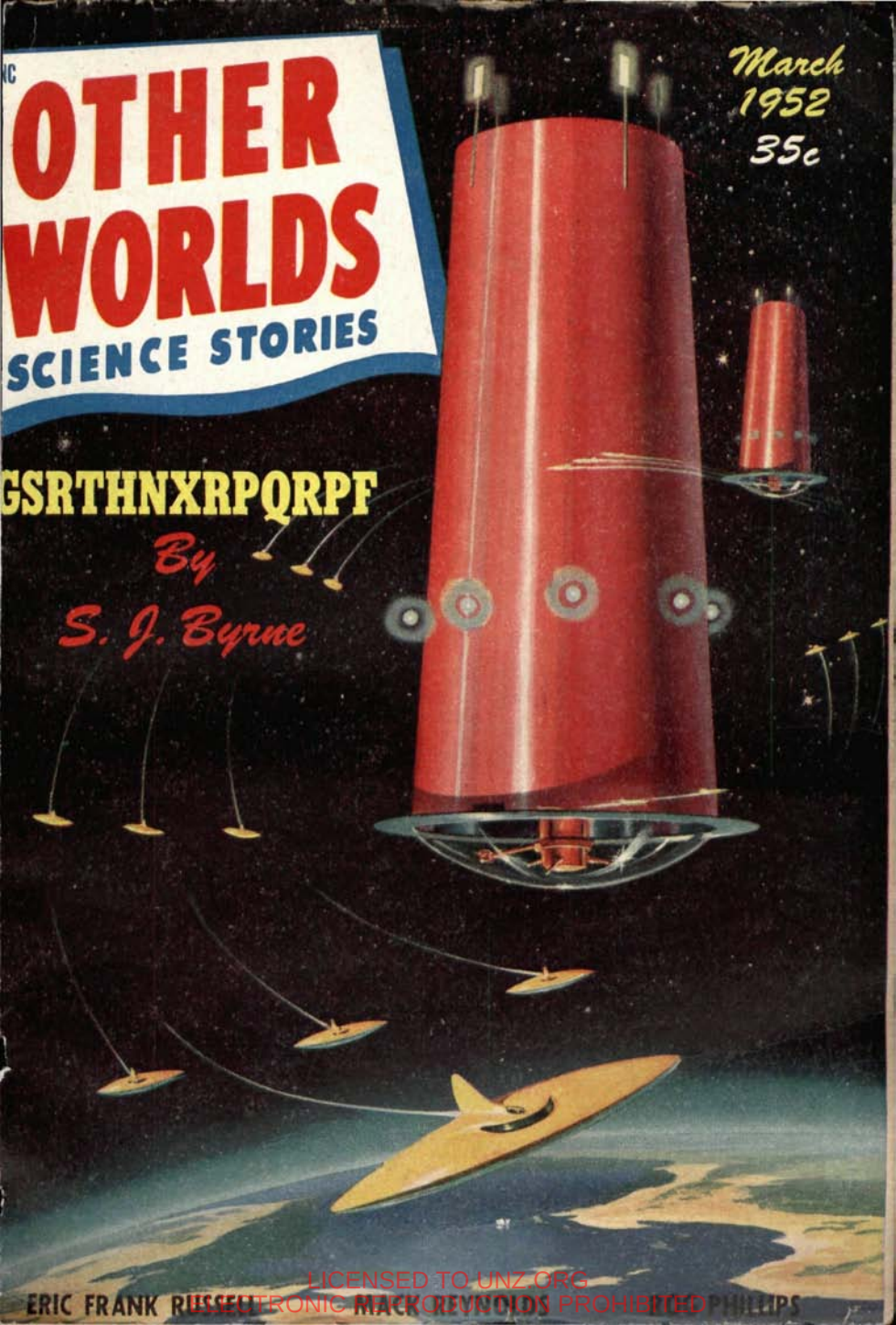
GSRTHNXRPQRPF

By

S. J. Byrne



ERIC FRANK RUSSELL MACK REYNOLDS [illegible] PHILLIPS

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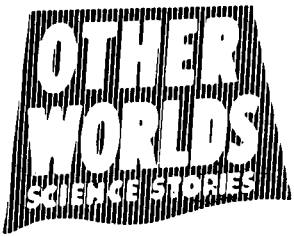

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Published every six weeks by

CLARK PUBLISHING COMPANY

1144 Ashland Avenue

Evanston, Illinois

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Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Printed in U.S.A. by the Stephens Printing Corporation of Sandusky, Ohio. Distributed by American News Company, Inc. of New York. No responsibility is undertaken for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or artwork. Return envelopes and sufficient return postage is required. Basic rates for accepted material, 1c per word. Advertising rates at request. Subscriptions: 12 issues, $3.00; 24 issues $6.00.

ISSUE NO. 17

MARCH 1952

April issue on sale February 19

EDITORIAL

EDITORIALLY speaking, we might call this issue a "spoiler". By that we mean the contents is such that it might "spoil" the reader for possible future issues—and make the editor's job a tough one in maintaining the diet initiated by the contents of the present number. We think the four nàmes on the contents page this issue represent a real all-star lineup. It would not be impossible, but it would be hard, to match the quality with any three other names. Consider it yourself and see if we aren't right: S. J. Byrne, Eric Frank Russell, Mack Reynolds, Roy Phillips. What does that add up to?

But then, add up the following names for future issues, and maybe you'll see that we've got a terrific future ahead of us! Merwin, Boucher, Shaver, Carnell, Hickey, Keyes, Bixby, Ashby, Russell, MacIntosh, Gibson, Evans, Reynolds, Bryne, DeVet, Fyfe, Miller, Bailey, Robin . . . and Palmer, Patton, Benson, etc.

Now that you have Phillips' terrific concluding installment of THESE ARE MY CHILDREN in your hands, you know we weren't kidding when we said it was his best work. So, when we ask you not to miss the next issue, April, we aren't kidding either. That issue will contain S. J. Byrne's GOLDEN GUARDSMEN, which is a 60,000 word sequel to the COLOSSUS I-

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II-III trilogy, which in its turn was a sequel to PROMETHEUS II which was published in *Amazing Stories*. In short, it is the 180,000th word of what actually is a tremendous complete novel. This also is Byrne's best work, and he'll be hard put to equal it!

Well, we've decided to give it to you! Yes, the 250,000 word novel! Something never before done in the pulp magazine field. The *longest* story ever run in any similar magazine. But each part of it will actually be complete in itself. We could call it a "series" around a group of characters. But this isn't just a set of "continued" and varied adventures. This is one vast adventure with many startling ramifications. When you've finished reading it, you will never forget it—because it will become part of your life!

But, enough of forecasts. We've got something on our mind and we want to talk right to your face about it. First, do you like the stories you are now reading in OTHER WORLDS? Your letters say you do. (And how! We'd like to thank you for giving us the most pleasurable reading we've had in ages! You know, if there's anything Ray Palmer likes, it's getting mail! He just loves to read letters. And lately he's been literally blowing his top with pleasure.) But now we're going to ask you to say you like them in another way. The way that's supposed to hurt! And what could hurt more

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Malcolm H. Smith

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than having to *pay* for telling us?

Here's our idea. Actually it's a burning itch, a driving desire, an irresistible hunger—we want to put OTHER WORLDS out monthly. And we just can't do it without help. To make this all clear, maybe we'd better give you a little history, and a few "inside" facts about publishing OTHER WORLDS, or, for that matter, any pulp magazine.

First, Ray Palmer began reading stf in 1926. That is, stf magazines. He'd read stf novels before—Verne, Wells, Haggard, etc. And he's read it ever since. He's a fan from the very beginning. Also, he began writing it in 1927. He's been writing it ever since. Then he became editor of *Amazing Stories*. He's been editing ever since. You might say he's pretty darn close to stf. It's practically his whole life. Finally, he achieved his dream, he began publishing it! And he's been publishing it ever since.

Of all the things he's done in stf, publishing was the hardest. It takes an awful lot of money. And characteristically, Ray Palmer never had much money because he spent most of it on stf. But since 1938 he's saved and saved and saved, and scrimped and scrounged and gouged . . . Then when he *thought* he had enough, he made the plunge. Ha, ha, ha! The deros are laughing yet! He didn't have half enough! What a hopeful, stars-in-his-eyes jerk he was! He'd heard of two- and three-issue reserves. But never looked in the dictionary to find out what they meant. Well, they mean the distributor (in the case of a bi-monthly) wants you to *deliver* the *third* issue before he pays you for the first! And in the case of a monthly, he won't pay until you deliver the fourth! So, it isn't a matter of *buying* one issue, stories, printing, paper, shipping, art work, engraving, etc. (gosh how many things there are to buy when you publish a magazine!). It's a matter of buying THREE. And on a monthly, FOUR.

But we mortgaged everything we had, including our house. (We finally had to sell it.) We squeaked through on a bi-monthly schedule. Then FATE stepped in (that's our other magazine) and we fell in our basement and were paralyzed. Knocked out of the running for nearly a full year. We had to buy a hospital in the bargain (only we never got the deed!).

If you only knew how close OTHER WORLDS was to becoming defunct . . .

Anyway, it sort of made us mad We had Bea Mahaffey (God bless that girl!) to carry on while we lay groaning. She did marvels without any experience at all. She saved OTHER WORLDS. We struggled back into harness and tried to pump new blood into the magazine. It took some time. We'd lost all our contacts. We'd no writers coming in for coffee and really hashing out the stories we need. We had to take

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pot-luck (and out of the pot comes pot-boilers). Don't think good stories are just written. Editors have to POUND them out of writers. By sheer force, ridicule, flattery, blood-letting, and primeval savagery. You have to cut them out of their HIDES!

Now we've got them eating out of our hand again . . .

And we've recouped some of the losses we suffered. We're almost ready to try again. If things go very well, we can go monthly in about two years. TWO YEARS! Oh Mother! We'll go *nuts* with impatience!

But we've got an idea. We're going to ask 2,000 of you readers to drop us a card or letter saying the following: "I will subscribe to OTHER WORLDS for 25 issues for $5.00 whenever you write me and say you are ready to accept my money and will promise to go monthly within three months thereafter." We don't want you to send any money. Because if we can't get 2000 of you to do it, we can't make the promise, and we won't promise anything we can't do!

Now, here's what this would mean to you: You'd get OTHER WORLDS for 20c per copy, a saving to you of 15c per copy. On the entire 25-issue subscription, you'd save $3.75. That amounts to 75% interest on your money! But more than that, we'll place your name on a "special" list which would guarantee that for the rest of your life (or OTHER WORLDS', whichever lasts longer) you could maintain your subscription for that same 20c per copy price, no matter what happened. In other words, you'd be drawing 75% interest on $2.50 every year without actually having made a single cent of investment that you wouldn't spend on OTHER WORLDS at the stands in slightly over seven months anyway!

Now, it's Ray Palmer who's asking this personally of his friends. And he only wants those who really want OTHER WORLDS to reach them every month instead of every six weeks, just as he does. And he doesn't want any of you to send any money until he finds out if there actually will be 2000 of you willing to put up $5.00 fourteen months before you'd put it up in the normal course of newsstand buying.

Only once before in our memory has an editor ever asked his readers to back him up like this. That instance was Hugo Gernsback, when he started WONDER STORIES. He wrote to all us fans and asked us to subscribe. We did. We never regretted the $5.00 we put up. THRILLING WONDER STORIES is still one of the best magazines on the stands, and we're proud to have been asked to help start it. But no matter how you respond, Ray Palmer's putting out OTHER WORLDS monthly *anyway*, sooner

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Illustration by H. W. McCauley

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QSRTHNXRPQRPF*

By

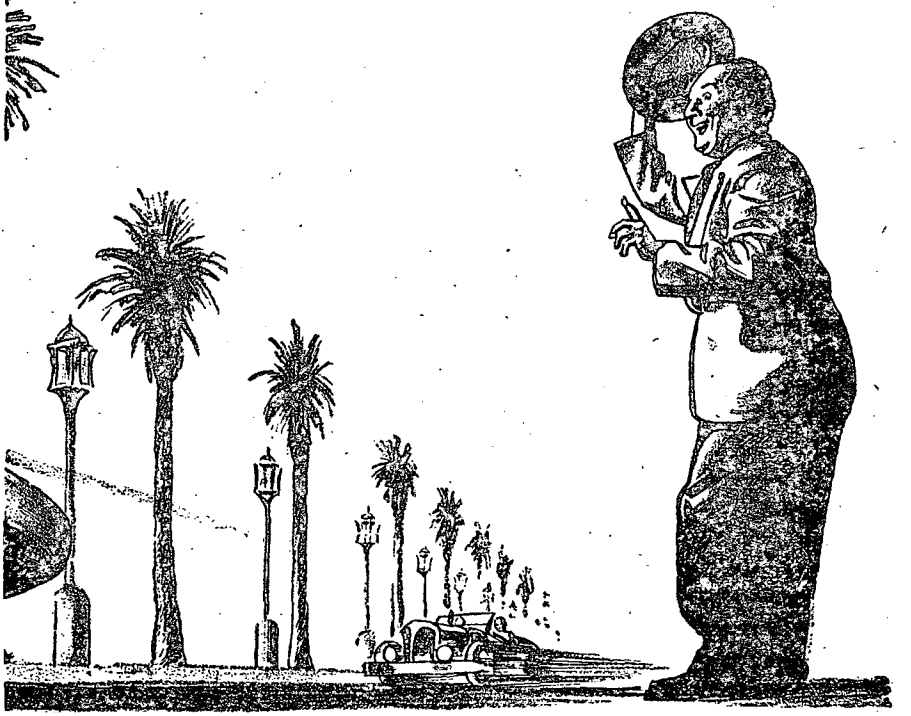
S. J. Byrne

Do you buy things you see on television? You are being hypnotized!

**An actual translation would drive you mad!*

WHEN the phone rang, I thought: What'll it be this time? Murder, rape, kidnapping, suicide, patricide, or just some anonymous bits of juicy scandal designed to ruin half a dozen well-launched careers?

As a reporter on the Los Angeles *Daily Blare*, I was being paid to scan



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the human panorama for news, just like my colleagues over at the *Examiner,* the *Times,* the *Mirror,* the *Herald-Express* and all the rest. So I answered the phone with very much of a mental "Ho hum!"

But that was the end of all "Ho hums." It was the beginning of hysterical pandemonium and the greatest chain reaction of shrieks and hollerings the world has ever known. It was the biggest scoop of all time.

Oh, the guy called other papers after he called me, but I was the first. And if I must sit henceforth in the Hall of Fame I'm afraid a very sheepish expression is going to be preserved on my otherwise handsome and inspiring physiognomy.

Reporters and other people who work close to a phone have a knack of visualizing the type of person they're talking to, and when this Soukup character started in I immediately expected to hear a cow moo or a cock crow in the background. He was definitely rural. But his everyday matter-of-factness threw me way off guard. I was sure he was going to tell me a chicken of his laid a polka-dot egg.

"Hello," I said, drably.

"Hello," he answered, by way of retaliation. "Is this the news desk?"

"Yes sir. Charlie Williams speaking. What can I do for you?" So far the conversation had been scintillating.

But then he hit me, and I fell off the chair with a reverberating crash. Not that I'm heavy, but the phone and the typewriter and I all tried to get into the wastepaper basket at the same time, and my chair knocked over the water cooler.

It was a minute to lunchtime, anyway.

In three seconds the whole office staff surrounded me, while Rural Delivery still chattered matter-of-factly on the phone. Faces looked down at me and at all the broken glass and paper cups. Men shouted. Good looking babes screamed. Doors banged. There was the sound of running feet. Heavy ones. That would be Griller, my apoplectic boss.

But still I couldn't move. I just lay there as though nothing mattered.

Griller was there before me— all six-foot-two and eyes of bloodshot-blue, with a brick complexion and a "final check" expression. He was shouting and making horrible noises, but still nothing mattered as I lay there with my ear glued to the receiver, listening to Soukup's instructions as to how to get out to his place near Arcadia.

Now I was light-headed, gay, debonnaire. I had the world by the tail —*if* Soukup was not insane. But he sounded too dumb to be insane. Besides, he gave me another number to call, for the *proof.*

"Charlie!" my boss bellowed at me. "If you don't get up off that floor—"

His facial expressions were always way ahead of his words, so he sel-

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dom had to finish a sentence. I got up, but I was outwardly calm and independent—despite a slight clattering of my heart, because everything in the world depended on that other number.

"When I say 'boo!'—get me a car and a police escort," I told him. "This may be the greatest scoop since Noah discovered dry land. Better yet, borrow me a helicopter!"

"What is it?" roared Griller. "By God, it better be good, or—"

I waved my hand imperiously for silence. Then, with a magnificent flourish, I dialed the operator and asked for an Arcadia number.

"Hello, Sergeant Masters, please. Oh, hello Sergeant. This is Williams, *Daily Blare*. Do you know Clarence Soukup? He says he— What? Oh, you *didn't* know him but you do now."

Police Sergeant Masters talked fast.

"Just a moment," I said, motioning to Griller. "Would you repeat that, please? The details are very important."

I gave the phone to Griller. By his time, nobody was thinking of lunch. They were all watching Griller's amazingly versatile face, myself included.

Buxom little, blonde little, cute little Mary Simpson tugged at my sleeve. "What is it, Charlie? What's —"

"Sssh! Hold it! Get hold of a desk! You'll have it in a minute!" I nodded toward Griller and she shut up. I did a double take at her blouse, then grimly turned back to Griller and business.

"He *what!*" shouted Griller. His eyes went round and glassy, and I must have looked hysterically smug. "You've *been* there? It's no fake? You mean—" His lips went wet and blubbery. Purple veins stood out on his forehead. If he had bawled or gibbered insanely I would have understood, maybe even joined him.

"Thanks!" said Griller into the phone. "You fellows have really done the Press a failure—I mean a favor! Yeah, I— What? All right, so we— Huh? Okay, then we'll thank Soukup when we get there! You know how much it means to get a story like this out in public before it gets shoveled under. In another hour it'll be top drawer secret stuff and that's the last anybody will hear about it. Yeah, I know you *have* to notify the government. Thanks again! We're in a hurry. Goodbye!"

"God bless Soukup, eh?" I quipped. "He insisted on calling the papers first."

"Well don't just stand there!" shouted Griller. "You're going out there in the Press car along with the Police, because that's the fastest. I'll stay here and get out a new front page. Take Simpson with you. Now *get!*"

"But it's lunchtime!" exclaimed Mary Simpson.

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Griller swelled up like a toad. "You're fired!" he exploded. "No, I mean—to hell with lunch! I'll buy you a whole hamburger stand later! Now you get out there and get some pictures and get right back! We've got to *roll* on this one!"

"But Griller!" protested Mack, one of my colleagues, who was greening with envy over my assignment. "You haven't told us yet! What's up? What's the big scoop?"

Griller's stubbly jaw shot out. "This is too big," he said. "Nobody gets it till it's on paper. Charlie, phone the details in and we'll write copy here. No time for you to get back before we start. Now scram!"

"Wait a minute," I said. "Liver Wits is out in Santa Monica with the Press car." I could never say Lieberwitz.

Griller's John L. brows bristled. "What's he doing out there?"

"There's an international convention of conchologists."

Griller struggled to look intelligent, then broke down. "What in the hell is a conchologist?"

I was grimly sweet. "They collect seashells," I said.

I think he would have screamed, but Speed, our red-thatched office boy, saved the day.

"Hey Charlie!" he yelled at me. "How about my hot-rod?"

"*That* thing!" I shrilled. "It's a dangerous secret weapon. I don't want anything to do with it!"

"Hold on!" interrupted Griller. "Speed, your hot-rod is pretty fast, isn't it?"

Mercurially, Speed was in his glory. "Seventy-five in second, Mr. Griller. She's got a milled-down head, aluminum pistons, oversize valves, special ignition, dual inch-and-a-half downdraft—"

Griller waved his hands in self-defense. "Okay! Okay! Give Williams the keys!"

"There *are* no keys," Speed said, brightly. "You have to hot-wire it!"

"Aren't you afraid somebody will steal it?" asked Petty-blouse Simpson.

"Uh-uh. Nobody can get it started but me."

So that is how Mary Simpson and Speed and I got to go out in a smoking, roaring hot-rod, convoyed by a whip-lashing string of shrieking, screeching police and government cars to Arcadia. Not that the Police were performing a service for the press. They had a big stake in what was happening, too. So did Mayor Dowron and a couple of Federal men and several brass hats out of the offices of the Army, the Navy and the Marine Corps, as well as some guys we were trying to beat who were bringing up the rear with a television camera and transmitter truck. It was one big picnic, and everybody had left their lunches behind . .

I YELLED at Speed above the coughing and sputtering of his hot-rod, which almost drowned out

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the sirens and the screech of tires. "Thought this heap could *roll!* We're the last hook on the zipper!"

Speed grinned in happy superiority. He even laughed. "We're only doing sixty!" he shouted. "Too slow for our compression—still in second! Can't even get it in high!"

"Can't *even!* What's beyond high?"

"Overdrive!"

Mary suddenly became intelligent. She bloused across me to yell at Speed. "We've got to beat everybody there if we don't want just turkey bones! Open her up, Speed!"

"I just got my license out of hock!" he retorted. "I'm afraid to pass those cops. But I know a short-cut!"

"Take it!" I yelled, plucking Mary's camera out of the air as we went over a bump.

That short cut . . . !

Well, we got there alive, somehow, and just about two blocks in the lead. I threw a clothesline, half a lemon tree and two chickens out of the car and jumped out.

And there was Clarence Soukup. He stood behind a low picket fence in front of his cactus-camouflaged ranch house. I thought his crew-cut head was slightly microcephalic but perhaps that was just a first impression. Tall, stoop-shouldered, skinny, with a sagging chin and watery blue eyes, he stood there in paint-spattered overalls, with a paint brush in one hand and a can of white paint in the other. His shoes were covered with paint. So was the ground. He had even managed to get some on the fence.

"I'm painting," he informed me, tonelessly.

"Glad to know you," I said, not without malice. "I'm Charlie Williams of the Daily Blare. This is Miss Simpson, our photographer, and Speed Riley, our driver. Don't let us interrupt your work, but would you mind letting us see it — you know, what you called us about?" I could not bring myself to say the fantastic word that would have described the object of our mission.

Suddenly, Soukup became aware of the approaching invasion of official cars. He dropped his paint and paint brush. A glint came into his pale blue eyes and his half-chin swung to three-quarters. He stooped down and plucked an old shot-gun up out of the grass.

"You kids get in here," he said, grimly. "I'm gonna cooperate with everybody; but the newspapers get it first! Now get going and I'll hold them off. It's out behind the barn and *he's* inside. Don't try to open it up. I've seen him as I told you over the phone, and he looks dangerous. Just get your pictures and then I'll let the rest in."

I didn't argue in the face of an all-time break like that. I blessed Speed's hot-rod, motioned to Simpson and Speed to follow me, and sprinted for the back barn.

We ran hard. Mary lost her pret-

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ty little shoes, but there was no time to carry her, nor did she ask me to. She kept digging her nylons through the clods right alongside me, and at the same time she was getting her camera ready.

Abruptly, we saw it. And we stopped. All the talk went out of us along with our breaths. This was no dream, no hoax, no hallucination. It was as real as washday and as big as the barn.

A shining, indubitable, one hundred proof space flier, fresh from God knew *where!* And inside somewhere, alive and as real as his ship, was the pilot, a highly intelligent being from another planet. Soukup said he had seen him in the broad light of day! And that he was man-shaped, but purple!

"Ye gods!" I exclaimed, wiping several kinds of sweat off my forehead.

"Cripes!" was all Speed had to offer.

Mary raised her Graflex and clicked the shutter. "F-8 ought to do it," she remarked, calmly. "Let's cop another angle!"

I could have kissed her, but this wasn't the time or the place, so I took a rain check. I didn't know whether to kiss Soukup or bat him over the head. Here was *the* Thing — and Soukup was painting his fence!

"WATCH it!" shouted Speed. "It's coming out!" He jumped behind me, as did Mary, and I wondered, with an audible gulp, what *I* could jump behind.

A glistening door was rotating smoothly into the interior of the ship.

Logic would have made us take to our heels, but terror not unmixed with fascination held us frozen in our tracks. This was to be Man's first glimpse of a creature from another planet—except for Soukup's preview, which I forgot for the moment.

"Mary!" I managed to gasp. "Your camera!"

"I—I'm afraid now," she whimpered. "*It* may not want me to—"

"Gimme!" I said, reaching with shaking hands for the Graflex. "I'd rather face a Man from Mars than Griller if we miss *this*—the greatest picture of all time!"

"Then let *me* take it, Charlie!" she pleaded, suddenly changing her mind as she thought of the publicity.

We were fighting over the camera when Speed tapped us both on the shoulder. He pointed at the ship, in speechless pallor. When we looked, we stopped struggling.

Our visitor was standing before us. He was approximately five feet tall, clothed very simply in a plastic-like pair of purple coveralls and a seamless pair of purple boots. On his back was what appeared to be a large knapsack, but a post antenna rose above it, topped by what looked like a crystal ball. At his

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wide belt I noticed several dials on a small box connected by wires to the knapsack.

"Even if he is hairless, he's human looking!" exclaimed Mary, who now had the camera again.

"Take that picture!" I ordered.

"He's purple, like Soukup told us!" said Speed.

"And he's smiling at us," I said. "That I like! Hold that smile, Mister Martian! It's for the *Daily Blare!*"

Mary clicked her picture and I said, "Get back to the car before the government men think up some excuse to keep this a secret. We'll join you as soon as I pick up a few more details!"

"But Charlie! I can't leave now! It's just getting started!"

"Orders!" I snapped. "Get going!"

Mary stamped her foot, forgetting about not having her shoes on. "Ouch!" she said. "All right, I'll go, but you'll be sorry! I hate you, Charlie Williams!"

"You'll love me later," I retorted, still watching the purple visitor. "Get going, sweetie pie, before I feed you to the *Thing!*"

It was then we became aware of the fact we were surrounded. Soukup was ahead of the crowd and apologetic.

"They got me," he said. "Search warrants, Martial Law procedures. I can't hold 'em any longer. Did you get what you wanted?"

"Just a moment!" said a tropic-tanned, Lord Calvert whiskey sort of Army Colonel. "We'll have to confiscate that camera until—"

"Oh no!" I protested heroically, without moving a muscle. And my voice cracked, fortunately, instead of my heart. "Not *that!*"

But the Army took the camera, and I gnashed my teeth in the good old-fashioned melodramatic sense of the word.

"Couldn't you let this one little old picture get through?" said Mary, undulatingly, and with a fetching roll of her eyes.

The Colonel laughed, did a double take at her, then clutched the camera with grim determination. Remembering our visitor, he checked his surroundings. A whole platoon of police officers was lined up. One had a sub-machine gun. Another had a tear-gas gun. There were a number of M.P.s from the various divisions of the armed services, and all carried rifles—Garands maybe. I don't remember.

All in all, about fifty Earthmen faced the visitor from out of space, who looked like any human except for his purple complexion and—oh yes, I forgot. Albino pink eyes. In fact, they were more red than pink.

"Well," said Soukup, "what are you going to do? You government people usually bury space ships and flying saucers or turn them into weather balloons or something. I'd sure like to see you try it now!"

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The Mayor cleared his throat. "Why, ah. That is, one of us will have to be spokesman. In my capacity as—"

"Just a minute," interrupted a Federal man. "This comes under immigration. Illegal entry. This man, or person, or whatever it is, has no passport. He may be carrying unknown disease germs. I'm afraid this is a matter for—"

"Does anyone here speak Martian?" I asked, sourly. "That might be a good start!"

"Charlie!" hissed Mary, alarmed. "You'll land in the brig!"

AT that moment, the space voyager spoke. "I speak English," he said, simply, in a gentle, kindly voice.

"You *do!*" I yelped. "How come? Where did you learn it?"

"On Mars, of course."

A murmur ran through the crowd. At long last, people could stop wondering what a Martian looked like, and a hundred million comic books were out-dated. This was *it*.

"What do you mean—of course?" I snapped at him. "How did you learn English on Mars?"

The Martian raised his brows, as though surprised at such a question. "Everyone understands English on Mars, as well as a little French, Italian, German, Russian, Spanish and other languages of Earth."

For some strange reason, the officials behind me were giving me the floor, so I continued. "But how? I mean—why? Have you visited Earth previously without our knowledge?"

"Yes, but not in the present era," replied the Martian. "This is our first attempt to land here in the past twenty-thousand years, when your so-called 'ancient' languages had hardly made their beginnings."

"Just a minute!" interrupted a tall, thin man in baggy tweeds and a tam. I recognized Dr. Arndt of Cal Tech immediately. He was, among other things, a technical consultant for the government and had no doubt been called in on this affair. He adjusted his horn-rimmed bifocals and stepped nearer to the Martian.

"Do you mean to say," he continued, slowly but tensely, "that your civilization was capable of interplanetary navigation twenty thousand years ago, and that you actually came to Earth then?"

The Martian sighed. "Do you mind if we go back into my ship?" he said. "I find your sun to be too much of a strain for me even under my gsrthnxrpqrpf." (What he said deserved to be spelled like that!) "Furthermore, the force of gravitation is too much even for my—"

"Not another word!" Mary Simpson interposed. "We accept! Brother! After that other word you said, I'm afraid of getting a charlie horse in my ear drums!"

"Of course!" replied Dr. Arndt

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to the Martian's question. "I'd like very much to see the inside of your ship, if you will permit us." He stepped forward, but was stopped dead in his tracks by one of the F.B.I. men.

"Nobody will enter that ship," said the latter. "The Martian is in quarantine until he can be examined. I'm surprised at you, Doctor Arndt, for overlooking the possibility that alien bacteria might be here against which there is no immunity or antidote. Do you want to start a plague?"

Dr. Arndt chuckled, academically. "Son, for the knowledge which may be gained here, a plague is of little consequence! Moreover, I am far ahead of you in my deductions. You must realize that our very advanced visitor undoubtedly foresaw the possibility of being contaminated by *us*. I doubt very much if there is a single living disease bacillus either on the Martian or on board his entire ship."

"In a way, you are right," replied the Martian. "Our previous expedition brought back to Mars a plague that nearly wiped us out and retarded the progress of our civilization for over ten thousand years. I am the result of generations of special breeding, just for this trip. I am immune to any disease bacillus the Earth can produce. Our remote controlled ships, the robot disks, brought back all the germs we needed for our experiments."

"The *disks!*" exclaimed several dozen of us at once.

Commander Meadows, of the Navy, broke into the conversation. "Do you mean to say that the flying disks are of Martian origin?"

"Of course! With them we penetrate your so-called Heavyside layer, pick up radio and television programs, and needle beam them to Mars, where they are rebroadcast. We have enjoyed your programs very much. That's how we learned English and various other languages of this planet."

"Ye gods!" I groaned to Mary and Speed. "There's Fricke of the *Times*—and Frank Savel, *Herald-Express!*"

The two gentlemen in question waved at me cheerfully, then stuck out their tongues. I owed them both a free lunch at the Duck Press Club, so I kept my tongue in my cheek, but I sweated. We heard other cars screeching to a halt out in front, and I knew half the State would be there in another hour. The television camera and transmitter truck was groaning in over a fallow bean-patch, but M.P.s were signalling it to halt.

"A lot of good my hot-rod did you!" grumbled Speed.

"Doggone it, Charlie!" Mary put in. "This is a stalemate. The scoop of twenty centuries, and censorship comes down like a guillotine—with no pictures, to boot!"

"Hey Soukup!" I yelled, with un-

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thinking inspiration. "Is that phone you called me from in your house?"

"Why yes, I—"

Fricke and Savel turned like Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, both with the same idea, but Army and Navy M.P.s plus a squad of policemen blocked their path.

"This is all restricted," said Army, "until it's cleared for release."

"Oh for God's sake!" I blurted out. "For once, forget it, will you? This is too big to hold back!"

The officials all glared at me, frigidly, and Soukup shook his head. "I tried my best," he said, "but they'll do it every time. No pictures. No news. No Martian. No ship. He can't stay outside. We can't go in!"

"I beg your pardon," said the Martian, politely, as he pointed to my hat. "Would you lend me that? We don't use hats on Mars—that is, we haven't until just lately."

"Sure!" I answered, instantly.

"I hope he's right about being immune to contagion," remarked Mary, with a smirk, but I ignored her.

"Never fear," replied the Martian. "I am utterly immune to disease. It took generations of special breeding and conditioning, but at least one of our kind passed the tests."

"Do you mean to say," said Dr. Arndt, "that you are the *only* Martian capable of visiting Earth?"

The Martian put on my size seven and a quarter Stetson and its slipped down to his little red eyes. He leaned back, like the Mad Hatter, to look at Dr. Arndt. "Yes," he answered. "The rest of my kind would perish. They have no immunity. That is why you may only see one of us in a generation or two. The racial memory of the Ancient Plague is ineradicable. In fact, my trip here is strictly one way. I can never return. They have seen to that."

F. B. I. MEN, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, police and Mayor Dowron all tensed and moved a step nearer, while Soukup blew his nose with a red bandana.

"What do you mean—they have seen to that?" asked the Mayor. "Why can't you return?"

"As soon as I landed, all my control relays dissolved, and the magnetic de-grav screens are all melted now. It's a hopeless mess. Ah, this hat certainly serves a practical purpose, after all. I feel better already."

The Lord Calvert Army Colonel motioned everyone to silence. "If you were so carefully bred for the journey," he said, "and if you are never to return to Mars, then what was your purpose in coming here, after all?"

"Oh there are many useful purposes, most of which are contingent upon my principal mission. For example, I should like to set up stations capable of receiving Martian broadcasts and suitable beam trans-

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mitters for Earthmen to use in communicating with Mars, so that we may dispense with the flying disk relay stations, and thus our two worlds may at least benefit from one another's cultures. There is much my people would like to ask, much that you could tell them. And vice versa. In addition to this, I have come here to buy many of your wonderfully advertised products. They can be shipped home on the disks and adequately sterilized upon arrival. Similarly, Martian goods may be shipped to Earth, thus stimulating interplanetary trade without the necessity for interplanetary travel, which practice we would oppose because of the danger of contamination."

"To construct such receiving and transmitter stations, and to buy goods, requires money," said the Navy Commander. "What do you expect to use for cash"

"It seems," said the Martian, with a gracious smile, "that your particular country, the United States, will lend money to anybody."

"Oh no!" I groaned aloud. I could see the headlines: CONGRESS APPROVES FIVE BILLION LOAN TO MARS!

"However," continued the Martian, "we do not intend to ask for a loan. We ask for nothing. Instead, I shall establish adequate credit for all operations."

"Credit?" queried the Navy Commander. "With what?"

"With pure radium and uranium."

THIS statement was followed by a stunned silence. F. B. I. men, Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Mayor Dowron all went into a huddle. In another thirty seconds, M.P.s and police officers were backing off the uninvited crowds of tourists and local Arcadians who had been gathering steadily by divisions.

Then the Navy Commander spoke again. "You—have a large amount of these pure elements with you?" he asked.

"I have some on board in shielded containers," replied the Martian. "More can be sent by the remote controlled disks. You see, by means of the disks we can even conduct mining operations anywhere in the solar system. Crude ores are brought in and refined on Mars."

Dr. Arndt looked pale with shock. "How much have you actually got on board?" he asked.

"Don't answer that question!" shouted an F. B. I. man. He was a large, heavy set fellow with a pair of eyebrows that reminded me of Griller. He had a tweakable sort of pug nose and ruddy cheeks plus a jaw and a set of teeth that iron bars could be bent on. I remember him well, because it was he who asked the sixty-four dollar question.

"What," he asked, "is your *principal* mission here?"

The diminutive purple Martian with the red eyes and the Mad Hat-

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ter's hat leaned backward to look at his interrogator. Then he smiled.

"How absent-minded of me," he said. "I should have announced it sooner!"

"Well?" snapped the Army Colonel. "What is it?"

"Simply expressed, it is this," replied the Martian. "I am the colonial Governor of Earth. My name is Rha'nan. By the authority vested in me by the Imperial Government of Gharlan the Fifth, of Zhroun, I hereby declare this planet, called Earth, to be henceforth and forever more an integral part of the Zhrounian Empire, and—"

"Shut up!" shouted the Colonel. "For a moment, we thought you were sane." He turned to his own M.P.s "Get him back into his ship and keep him there until we've decided what to do with the idiot!"

Immediately, the M.P.s started forward, rifles in hand.

"Get back into your ship!" ordered the Colonel. "You are under arrest!"

The Martian only smiled and turned his attention to Mary Simpson. I really thought for sure he was off his rockers, like the Colonel said.

"It is a shame," he said, "that you were deprived of your camera. I believe you wanted to get my picture to your newspaper office? Come, I'll accompany you into town." He stepped forward to where we were standing and took both Mary and myself by an arm, while he smiled at Speed. "This is such a curiously confused world you live in," he continued. "It will take me several days to straighten it out, I'm afraid."

"Get away from him!" shouted the Colonel. All armed men deployed outward, effectively surrounding us.

"Charlie!" cried Mary. "What'll we do?"

I hated to answer that question, because I hated to lose the precious ground gained in the Martian's confidence, even if he was crazy. I opened my mouth to say something, but that was as far as I got.

In that moment, we *all* passed out—instantly . . .

THE amazing concatenation of swift events which followed is so involved that I can only cover them in brief review, up to the turning point where the Army used some of its own secret weapons.

You are all familiar with the Martian's disk-shaped speed wagon without wheels. It could float about a foot off the highway and glide as fast as traffic would allow. On straightaways I know we did a hundred miles per hour. He must have taken the contraption out of his ship when we were unconscious.

Anyway, he took me and Mary and Speed straight to town. You can imagine the confusion caused by his floating a foot off the ground in his

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unearthly disk-mobile at Eighth and Figueroa Streets and asking the traffic officer in polite English, from under the brim of my hat, where the *Daily Blare* was located.

That's the way the afternoon started. He left a trail of temporarily unconscious pedestrians and motorists behind him, wherever resistance was offered. A mess occurred at Broadway and Ninth when a streetcar, out of control, crashed into a truckload of pies and a custard cream hit a passing motorist square in the face. It happened to be Bob Hope, who immediately blamed his companion for starting the whole thing just for a gag. No one found out who his companion was because he pulled his hat down over his face and said he had just come from the Hollywood Race Track and was not in a mood to give a statement to the Press at the time.

So it was that the *Daily Blare* came out in an exclusive edition, with pictures and personal interviews with the Martian. During that interview, incidentally, he gave us some additional information.

Control of Earth's governments was considered imperative because of our "amateurish" handling of nuclear energies. Rha'nan, the Martian, explained that there used to be a very nice, flourishing planet between Mars and Jupiter until somebody released a true chain reaction there. The resultant explosion created the asteroids and produced cataclysms on every other minor planet, particularly on Mars and on Earth. He told us this is what lost Mars a goodly portion of its atmosphere and caused the Earth to tip on its axis and suffer the Flood of biblical times. The people of Mars did not want this to happen again. In his interview he made a proclamation outlawing all explosives dependent upon nuclear fission *or* nuclear synthesis. He said he would show us how to use atomic energy constructively, but he intimated we would find magnetic energy far more useful, once he showed us how to use it.

There were several attempts on the part of the government to place him under arrest, but they all failed. He told officials they had better take the uranium and radium out of his ship and establish credit for him or he'd start robbing banks.

When they did nothing about it, he knocked everybody out at the Union & Trust Bank and walked out with over a hundred thousand dollars. But we had become his mouthpiece, and he made the *Daily Blare* publish the fact that he had not harmed anyone or stolen the money. He had left a signed counter check for the full amount, which would be valid as soon as the government paid him for the radium and the uranium.

So they set up credit for him, as they discovered his little cargo to

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be worth about ten million dollars.

After that, he went on a buying spree. He bought the strangest commodities—television sets, washing machines, potato chips, automobiles by the dozen. Two factors became evident which started a mad rush of advertising campaigns and a feverish ballooning of the stock market.

True to his original statements, he was buying for Mars. And what he bought were things he saw or heard advertised, particularly on television. He was utterly fascinated by television advertising. The advertisers really went mad when the fact sank in that sponsors were getting coverage on two planets.

In the midst of it all, world governments were sent into a spin. All the agendas for discussion in congresses and parliaments around the world, including those of the United Nations, were suspended in favor of special sessions to examine the case of Rha'nan, the Man from Mars.

To impress the people with his powers, Rha'nan staged an international television broadcast, from Hollywood. Flying saucers in the upper atmosphere relayed the program everywhere, converting to positive or negative transmission wherever necessary, so that all countries equipped with television networks were able to see him. During the broadcast, he called Stalin on the telephone, at his own personal expense.

"You will desist at once," he told Stalin. "The original constitution of your country is a fine document—for *your* country—but you don't adhere to it. You and your *Politburo* are nothing more than an insidious machine, fabricating lies, world disorder and obstacles in the path of free enterprise and enlightenment solely for the sake of a Ghengis Khan brand of barbaric despotism. I do not like you, Stalin—and besides, I *hate* caviar!"

When Stalin calmly informed him he could not be bothered talking to an idiot who was not a Party Member, Rha'nan relayed something from his magic little knapsack to his ship and to flying saucers poised over Moscow. Half of Russia passed out for three days. And across the world the nations of both Democratic and Communistic camps conferred. *What was to be done?*

Then, too, there were developments close to home which affected me, personally. The purple little devil was taking a shine to Mary Simpson, the girl I had secretly intended to propose to, if she could ever get a job which would support me in the manner to which I wanted to get accustomed. In fact, he succeeded in casting a hypnotic spell over her, and she waited on him hand and foot. Trilby-like, she claimed he was wonderful and that she was happy to be his slave.

He had taken up residence right in the offices of the *Daily Blare*, and we did nothing but obey his

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slightest commands. He ate plenty of Smacky-Snack potato chips and consumed cases of Fashion-Fizz beverages, because his favorite television program was *Time for Weenie,* sponsored by Vit-A-Tomic Foods. In between, he ate hot dogs made with Vit-A-Tomic brand weenies and drank Inst-A-Roma coffee, which sponsored the space opera known as *Galactic Gunmen.*

Things came to a head, for me, when he had a "costume" made for Mary which, he claimed, was what would be suitable apparel for a Martian woman . . .

FOR days I had been trying to awaken Mary out of her trance. Three times the Martian had knocked me out with his ray box for interfering. And each time I had come back for more.

On this particular evening, Rha-'nan's buzzer rang for me, and I went to his suite of offices, glad for the chance to see if Mary was all right. When I entered into his presence, I found him still wearing my hat, his head tilted back so that he could watch his television set. He watched the TV program with a glazed, trance-like look about his eyes. The sponsor's salesman on the screen was saying:

"*No* other vitamin manufacturer dares make such an offer, ladies and gentlemen. If you will try our free trial triple combination offer, we *guarantee* that you will look better, feel better and live better than you have since you were twenty-one! Now the number for you to call to avail yourselves of this unprecedented offer *AND* the incentive prize of five hundred pieces of genuine gold-dipped Chinaware—"

"Mary!" shouted Rha'nan. "Take this number!"

When Mary came in, my chin dropped, and I choked. She was naked except for a scanty lacework of diamonds about her torso.

Since I had hoped to call Mary my wife someday, the whole thing struck me as being sacrilegious—on the Martian's part—in spite of her young beauty which sent my heart wobbling off the ecliptic. This was usurpation on an intimately personal level, and I stood there fuming, with my fists clenched.

Mary smiled at me naively and dutifully watched the television screen long enough to take down the telephone number of the vitamin distributor. For the moment, I was paralyzed by the sight of her. She was beautiful beyond everything she had ever been in a bathing suit.

"Williams," said the Martian, briskly. "I want you to take down an editorial I wish to have published. Its subject will be—"

"I don't give a damn what it will be!" I roared at him. "You've gone too far! Mary!" I shouted. "You go get some clothes on! I'm going to take you out of here!"

Mary only smiled in a way that

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made my knees rubbery. "I am sorry, Charlie," she said. "I can't go with you unless Rha'nan says so."

"Just a moment," said Rha'nan. He had been seated, but now he rose to his feet, fingering the dials at his belt. "I knocked you out before. Perhaps I had better place you in suspended animation. You are beginning to be troublesome!"

For answer, I did a flying tackle and managed to pull his wires loose. Then I socked him and he fell down, but not out. I jumped on top of him, intent upon murder.

In the same moment, however, his eyes caught mine and held.

"You hear only my mind—" came his thoughts. *"All extraneous sounds are lost to you. You are tired, your eyes are heavy with sleep—"*

Struggle though I might, I could not resist him. So I soon lay there in a trance, and Rha'nan put his wires back in place. But then he received the shock of his life. His ray box was dead! Very soon after that, he got it on the news.

The Army had just succeeded in breaking through the protective screens surrounding the Martian's ship out in Arcadia. They had entered the ship on one previous occasion, with Rha'nan's permission, to pick up the radium and uranium, but they had never been able to get near the forward sections where they surmised the apparatus was that relayed signals to the flying saucers.

Shells fired at the ship exploded harmlessly against its protective screens. Bombs exploded in the sky before they could start to fall, destroying their own carriers. It seemed to be hopeless until I pulled the Martian's wires loose.

In that single moment he was out of contact with his ship, unable to change the frequency of the screens, and the Army struck home with ultra-powerful super frequency jammers and made a hole in the screens big enough to get secret atomic artillery shells through. The result was a crater in which Soukup later installed a duck pond.

RHA'NAN stood there looking down at me, with his red eyes getting redder. I could not move very easily, but I could hear and understand.

"The fools!" he exclaimed. "I came here with benevolent good intent, but your people don't want that! They want to strike back and destroy!—blindly! This proves they deserve the master's whip! And I'll give it to them!"

His eyes fairly sparkled with rage as he looked at me. "Are you such children, to think that I would come ill prepared for such foolishness as this! I'll show you!"

He stepped over to the desk beside Mary and picked up the phone. "This is Rha'nan," he told the op-

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erator. "Connect me at once with the President of the United States! At once, do you hear!"

There was some delay, naturally, so he took advantage of it by speaking into the phone. "I might remind any would-be detectives tapping this line that the more who listen in on this conversation the more it will serve my purpose. Please feel free to use any tape recordings you may be making, for international radio broadcast!"

Finally, it seemed that the President was on the line. "You are not as clever as you think!" the Martian almost shrieked into the phone. "Your destruction of my ship has sealed the fate of the whole planet! You did not know that in each of the flying disks, of which there are thousands in your atmosphere, there is a deadly magnetic weapon. One disk can wipe out a whole countryside! Do you know what has kept these weapons under control, so that they would not lash out and destroy you? A periodic pulsator on my ship! Without that pulsator, the disks will automatically open fire within forty-eight hours! Every major city on the face of the Earth will be destroyed!"

He gasped for breath, pushed my hat back out of his eyes, and went on. "But we Martians do not like destruction. We have frowned on your war-making and your constant building of greater machines of destruction. We do not want to destroy you even under such conditions of revolt as this. So I will tell you that the destruction of my ship was also the signal for dispatching a spare robot ship with duplicate relays on board for controlling the disks. That ship was on the Moon, Earth's satellite. Even now it is hurtling through space toward Earth. It will be here in just ten hours. When it arrives, I shall save your lives by controlling the disks.

"So in the meantime I suggest that you advise all concerned to avoid any attacks upon my person, as otherwise you are doomed. I am the only one who can save you now!"

Whereupon, he banged the receiver down and took Mary by the hand. "Come with me!" he said. "We are going for a little ride!"

JUST as they left the office, the telephone rang insistently. I knew it was an emergency call. In my strenuous efforts to get up, I knocked my head against a chair and the blow shook me partially out of my trance.

I wanted to run after the Martian, but my feet were dragging tons of lead. I needed help in a hurry. So I answered the phone.

"Hello!" I said, inanely. "Help! I need help! He's taken her! He's —he's—"

"Shut up and listen!" I recognized the voice of Doctor Arndt of Cal Tech, but since I had last heard

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him speak his character had changed decisively from passive to dynamic. I could also hear Army or Federal men mumbling words of advice over his shoulder. "We know what's been going on in there," he said. "We know a lot more than we dared tell the newspapers. This is Dr. Arndt speaking. I've been working on the Martian ever since he arrived. Now listen! *You've* got to follow him! If we followed him he'd suspect other motives. But you want to rescue your girlfriend."

"Fiancee," I corrected him, thinking wishfully.

"Shut up! That's all the better. Now you trail him immediately. The word is out—everywhere. The whole State is going to help you in this act. You can commandeer any vehicle or facilities you need. But trail him—that is, catch up to him. Tell him you'll do anything he wants if he'll not harm the girl. Pretend to make a deal, that you'll be his go between and get him anything he wants. But what you've *got* to do is get him inside somewhere in front of a television set. I am going to make a special broadcast every half hour on all channels, and *he* must see that broadcast. It's our only chance. *Now get going!*"

Wondering, befuddled, desperate—I stumbled out of the office, shaking my head to clear it. Griller and Speed and Mack and even Lieberwitz were beside me immediately, helping me to get going. They had been listening on the outside phone.

"Throw some water in my face!" I yelled. "Slap me!"

Lieberwitz was glad to oblige. In fact, there was a fiendish gleam in his eyes as he splashed me and slapped me.

"All right! All right!" I yelled, suddenly more alert.

"What a night!" groaned Griller, apoplectically. "This is the burning of Rome, and everything's so gummed up all over town we ran out of newsprint—at a time like this! Here! Give me some of that water!" He splashed a cupful into his own face.

They guided me toward the stairs.

"Elevator!" I gasped, struggling to take another direction.

"Motor's burned out!" said Griller. "All hell's breaking loose!"

"What time is it—only nine thirty?" I asked, looking at the electric clock on the wall.

"No. All the electric clocks are wrong. It's after ten. Now get going!"

They practically threw me down the stairs and that helped brighten my wits some more. The fresh air outside completed the job. There were lights, mobs of people, but no panic—only tenseness. They were trying to play the game. They were waiting for me, with printed instructions in their hands—instructions the government had not dared broadcast.

"The Martian went straight out

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North Main," said a police officer. 'Here's a car. Now follow him!"

"Hey Williams!" shouted a hauntingly familiar voice.

I looked out in the street and saw Soukup driving a truck. He still had on his painting coveralls and his chin was at normal half-mast.

"What'll I do with this heap?" he shouted, jerking his thumb toward the rear of the truck. "Nobody come back for it an' I'll be damned if I could get it started!"

"My hot rod!" yelled Speed. "And just in time! Get it off the truck and I'll drive it!"

"Forget it!" said the police officer. "Come on Williams!" He opened the door of an innocent looking sedan. "This is a police special in disguise. It'll travel!"

I moved forward, but Speed blocked me. "Please, Charlie!" he yelled. 'You need something fast! Let me take you in the hot-rod! It's underslung! It'll stick to the road better! I've never had a chance to open it up, but I was clocked at a hundred and twenty before I rolled her over."

"Is *that* so!" said the officer, glaring at Speed in sudden recognition.

"Well, it was at Dry Lakes," Speed covered up, quickly.

Dozens of eager hands had been busy pulling Speed's hot-rod out of the truck, and now it stood, or *lay*, in the street. Having been impressed by a certain memorable "short cut" taken in the remarkable contraption, I allowed instinct to gravitate me in its direction. Speed and I clambered into it.

"This has got to deliver the goods, Speed," I said.

"Do you realize," said the irate officer, "that the fate of the whole world depends on this bundle of haywire?"

And I thought: To the devil with global thinking. Mary is object number one.

"So long!" said Soukup, as the engine roared suddenly to life. "Come out my way sometime! Got my fence all painted now!"

I didn't answer, because tires screeched, gears jammed, my head almost took a back seat, and we were off in a cloud of uncertainties.

THE police officer who had offered us his car deliberately followed us to see when I would be ready to change my mind. Ahead of us, other officers sprang into action on motorcycles and tried to wave us down, until they saw who I was. Then they started to lead the way on the preliminary stretch up Main Street to the old north bridge.

We were only doing fifty-five because the traffic was a little uncertain yet. The officer who was trailing us in the car came alongside. Speed's hot-rod was shuddering and smoking like a fizzling rocket.

"Come on! Come on!" yelled the police officer. "Get out of that gar-

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bage can and climb on a horse! You gotta get going!"

To demonstrate his speed, he skidded his wheels and took off doing sixty. I looked at Speed, worried.

Speed grinned in sudden glee. He reached down, pulled a shutter out of his muffler, and we roared like a four-engined bomber. Then he clashed back into second and my head jerked again.

We passed the police special in second gear. At close to seventy, Speed shifted to high and we streaked ahead, hitting eighty. We had left the motorcycles behind us. The road ahead was clear. But the police special caught up and passed us again. However, this time the officer had a grim look on his face.

Speed grinned again as we jerked into overdrive and passed the other car at close to ninety.

"Now you're going places!" I shouted. Then—*"Watch out!"*

A river of lights was in front of us—a sea of startled faces. Speed skidded and drove on two wheels to get around the mob and avoid hitting three cars.

"He's straight ahead!" I heard somebody yell.

And then we saw the weird disk-mobile, gliding smoothly ahead, floating a foot off the ground as though on invisible wheels.

Speed gritted his teeth and stepped on the gas. I gritted my teeth and stepped on the floorboards. The speedometer crept toward the hundred mark. We were roaring like thunder. The telephone poles began to look like a stockade.

The Martian surged ahead, and Speed stepped harder on the gas. We had swung onto Huntington Drive and had more freeway, but the more freeway there was the faster the Martian traveled.

At a hundred and twenty I could see it was going to be a case of who was the better driver, the Martian or Speed. The road just would not permit us to go faster.

It was out near Santa Anita that we pulled alongside the disk-mobile, and suddenly the Martian began to slow to a stop.

Half a mile down the road, he did stop, and so did we. He was fifty feet behind us, and his disk-mobile pancaked to the pavement as light as a feather. Speed and I piled out, and he did likewise. He stood there in a purple sort of silence, waiting for us.

I wanted to break his neck, but instead I said, "You win, Rha'nan! If you don't harm Mary I'll do anything you say!"

Rha'nan surveyed us curiously. "Do you mean to say that is an ordinary vehicle you were driving?" he asked. "I thought it was an engine of destruction. You are unarmed!"

"Of course!" I said. "But look! You don't understand us Earth people. Mary will catch a disease called pneumonia if you don't let me

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put my coat around her and get her inside somewhere." I saw a rancho-style bungalows nearby behind some giant pepper trees, and it was definitely sprouting a TV antenna.

Rha'nan hesitated. "I have no reason to fear you," he said. "You know the power I have over your simple mind. So I will tell you this. As you have perhaps surmised, I am en route to the site where the other ship will land. It is not far."

"Good!" I said, taking off my coat. "Then you can afford to let me get Mary inside that house over there. She is probably freezing to death."

Without waiting for permission, I leaned over the side of his disk-mobile and groped for Mary. In a moment I found her and draped my coat over her shoulders. I opened the door and guided her out. She only looked at me with a childish sweetness and smiled.

"Mary," I said, buttoning the coat, "keep that *around* you!"

"There can be no harm," said the Martian. "It appears that your people are going to cooperate. Besides —" he added, glancing at the house, "they are showing a picture called *The Man From Planet* Z tonight at eleven. I might as well see it and have something to eat."

We all headed for the house behind the trees. . . .

THE house was unoccupied at the moment, so I broke the door open, keeping in mind Dr. Arndt's admonition to commandeer anything I needed.

"You have very little regard for private property," commented Rha'nan.

"You are the Governor of the Earth," I said. "The door is a small item. Come on in!"

Speed had already turned on the lights. It was a well-furnished bungalow with a long, raised living room. I could tell people lived here every day by the freshly cut flowers in a vase on the television console. Also, there was no dust on anything.

"Make yourself at home," I said. "I'm going to look for some more clothes for Mary."

"Your coat is enough," replied Rha'nan. "I like her as she is."

"But it's night!" I protested. "She'll catch cold!"

"Forget it! She's inside now. We will watch television. Speed, go get us some food!"

I let well enough alone. To my right was a fireplace. Above it on the mantlepiece was an old-fashioned, spring-wound clock. It registered ten minutes to eleven.

The Martian made Mary and me sit where he could watch us. Then he took an overstuffed chair and sat down on it, pushing my hat back on his hairless head.

"Turn on the television," he said. "Until eleven we can watch channel nine."

I obeyed, and we were soon watch-

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ing a quiz program M.C.'d by Groucho Marx. All across the country they were putting on an act, pretending normalcy, feigning compliance with Rha'nan's instructions, giving the impression that they trusted his word, that he would control the disks in time. Groucho was doing a good job at an old game which had but one rule: The show must go on!

"So you're a tightrope artist," he was saying to a buxom girl contestant. "Hmmm," he said with a purposeful eye, "ah, how do you keep your balance?"

The laughter from the studio audience must have piqued the girl into demonstrating her erudition. "By means of my semi-circular canals," she replied, calmly.

Groucho looked at his studio audience and let them roar with laughter at what they thought he might be thinking. He looked the girl over and brought his famous eyebrows into play.

"Ah, just where are your semi-circular canals?" he asked.

"In my ears, where else?"

"Isn't nature wonderful?" He wasn't looking at her ears. "Now tell me, Gertrude, what if those canals in your ears weren't semi-circular? Suppose they were straight, just like the canals on Mars?"

"Then I'd lose my balance, I suppose."

He looked at her with a cocked eyebrow. Then he turned to the audience and said, "I've been wondering about our 'New Governor.' Maybe somebody should semi-circularize *his* canals!"

It was irrepressible ad lib, and Federal censors cut the show. I quickly changed to channel eleven.

"I don't like that!" said Rha'nan. "I didn't quite understand what was said, but I feel it was not complimentary."

"It wasn't," I admitted. "That's why the show was cut off the air. "What channel is that picture on that you wanted to see?" I looked at the clock. It was three minutes to eleven. In three minutes, Dr. Arndt would be broadcasting. I felt suddenly triumphant. I had done what they wanted me to do. I had the Martian in front of a TV set at the prescribed time.

"I'm more tired than I thought," said Rha'nan. "I need some rest. Shut it off!"

Just as my pulse began to chatter, Speed came in with sandwiches, potato chips and linen napkins. He served Rha'nan first, Mary second, and me third. He was clumsy and he stepped on my toes.

I yelled, then looked up at him. He winked at me and motioned with his eyes at my napkin. It was lumpy. Out of one end was protruding the snout of an automatic that Speed had found in the house.

I sat back against the TV, knees up, hiding the napkin. I chewed a sandwich with exaggerated gusto, at

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the same time getting a grip on the gun under the napkin. I watched the clock. It was one minute to eleven. Mary nibbled listlessly at her sandwich.

The Martian looked approvingly at the potato chips. "Smacky-Snacks!" he exclaimed. Then he glared at me. "I said shut off that television set!"

At thirty seconds to eleven I pointed the automatic at him, and Mary stiffened with surprise. Rha-'nan did not move a muscle. He merely stopped chewing his potato chips.

"I don't like to be ordered around," I said. "We're going to watch television."

"You are very deceptive," Rha-'nan replied, calmly. "But your lack of logic intrigues me. How could that gun possibly constitute a threat when my death could only mean the end of this planet? You would not dare shoot me."

"I can injure you," I said. "A couple of lead slugs in your arms would be very painful."

"I see. Well, you must be taught a lesson."

Then, what I had feared began to happen. Into my mind came his terrifying mental voice. *"You cannot resist my mind,"* it said. *"Your body cannot obey your will. It can only obey mine! Give me that gun!"*

JUST as my faculties began to waver, I became aware of a strange flickering of the television screen. Suddenly, the mental voice became silent. Rha'nan was watching the TV. So was Speed—and Mary.

I shook my head to clear it. Then I looked also.

The image was fuzzy, but I recognized Dr. Arndt. The image wavered, cleared, then wavered again. It continued to do so in a slow, weird rhythm that was hypnotic.

"Rha'nan of Mars," said Dr. Arndt, in sepulchral tones. His long face was illuminated from below, accentuating the shadows, making him appear to be a mystic. "You hear only my voice. What I shall tell you now is a great revelation for you—a secret that has been withheld from you and your race. Listen to me now, Rha'nan, and your life will be changed."

I looked at the Martian and saw that he was falling into a trance. Dr. Arndt droned onward and the slow, hypnotic pulse of the blurring and clearing image continued relentlessly . . .

"You are powerless to know any other will than mine," continued Arndt. "You will accept what I say as a lasting revelation that you and your people will never forget. Now hear me, Rha'nan. The people of earth are your masters. You cannot prevail against us. To try will be to destroy yourself and your planet. Therefore, when your control ship arrives, you will board it and return whence you came, and you will take

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all the robot disks with you— and neither you nor any of your kind will ever enter our skies again, under penalty of instant death!"

Very carefully, Dr. Arndt repeated the whole performance again. Then he said, "Now go to the nearest telephone and tell the operator to give you Trinity nine one two eight. I will answer that phone. When I do so, you will tell me that you have heard, and that you will obey. *Now go!*"

To the intense surprise of Speed and myself, Rha'nan rose slowly to his feet. I staggered to mine and hissed at Speed.

"Quick! Show him the phone!"

It was at the end of the room. Speed ran to it and held it out to Rha'nan. Like a somnambulist, he walked to it and took it. Speed had already dialed for the operator.

"Trinity— nine one two eight," said Rha'nan. I ran over to Mary and hugged her, still watching the Martian. "This is Rha'nan," he said, to Dr. Arndt. "I have heard. I will obey."

In thirty seconds the TV screen stopped pulsating. It cleared, and Arndt smiled triumphantly at us.

"Williams!" he exclaimed. "We know where you are. That car we *wanted* you to take had a two way radio. The police officer trailed you and we have located him. He is out in front of your place now, and others are close behind him. My congratulations to you and Speed! You have saved the entire planet!"

I'll never forget how dejected looking Rha'nan appeared to us in that moment with my hat sagging down around his ears. He merely waited for us to lead him away . . .

WHEN Rha'nan's auxiliary ship arrived, he obeyed orders and left. We also presumed that the disks left, inasmuch as no damage resulted from destructive magnetic rays.

Mary and I went out to Cal Tech to visit Dr. Arndt in his laboratories, and he finally gave us an explanation.

"You were not expected to know," he said, "that the Martian was psychologically susceptible to the peculiar combination of sixty fields per second and five hundred and twenty-five scanning lines that constitute a black and white television image, or that *all* Martians were equally affected as they watched the programs relayed to them by means of their own needle-beams. Naturally, the Martians were intrigued particularly by our programs depicting interplanetary flight, such as *Space Patrol, Flash Gordon, and Galactic Gunmen.* And inasmuch as such stories dealt principally with conquests of other worlds, they succumbed to hypnotic suggestion and finally tried it, themselves.

"I suspected this very strongly when I observed how ridiculously susceptible Rha'nan was to television

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advertising. By experimenting with city power and altering the cycles slightly, I found the correct combination that gave us the optimum desired effect, as proven by when and what Rha'nan bought, under varied broadcast conditions. Then I made a film of myself acting in the role of a hypnotist. It was broadcast on all channels over every television network on Earth, as we knew it would be picked up by the disks and relayed to Mars."

"Then all the Martians have the same idea, that Earth cannot be conquered?" asked Mary.

Dr. Arndt smiled at her. "I believe so," he answered. "It was a form of mass hypnosis."

I began to laugh and they both stared at me, so I explained. "Rha'nan was immune to all diseases but TV advertising! That's one the Martians didn't figure on!"

Mary ignored me. "I'm glad," she said, "that nobody got to find out how those space ships worked. It gives me the creeps to think of anyone going to Mars."

"You forget," said Dr. Arndt, "that the Martian left us his disk-mobile."

"You mean that flying flapjack!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. We have already succeeded in analyzing its anti-gravity screens, which consist of ingenious electrostatic fields capable of creating atomic stasis, just like putting matter in a deep freeze. When that condition is obtained, the action of gravity ceases. The screens are low-powered, just capable of keeping the disk-mobile off the ground, but we feel certain we can build high powered anti-gravity screens and eventually visit the planets."

"Oh no!" protested Mary. "What possible reasons could men have for going to *other* worlds? Isn't this one good enough?"

"Sure it's a good old snafu world," I told her, "if you don't mind taxes and the high price of sirloins—but I have a darned good reason for going to Mars."

Dr. Arndt's deep-set eyes gazed at me in wondering reappraisal. "What reason is that, Charlie?" he asked.

"To get back my hat," I said . . .

THE END

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I'M A STRANGER HERE MYSELF

By

Eric Frank Russell

Intuitively John Wilson knew he was a stranger here on Earth. But it took a psychiatrist to uncover the truth about his weird delusion . . .

A neat matron in her early forties, she was slightly flustered as she came into the room.

"Please be seated, Mrs. Enderby," invited Wilson. His sharp eyes watched her lower into a chair. He gave her a few moments to get settled. "In what way can I help you?"

"It isn't me, Mr. Wilson. It's my boy John."

"Indeed? Is he giving you trouble?"

"Not exactly." She pulled off her gloves, toyed with them nervously. Her left hand bore a ring with sapphires that matched her eyes. "It's just that his personality seems to be changing."

"All children change."

"Not the way John's doing."

Smiling tolerantly, Wilson said, "Few mothers understand sons, especially as they grow older. It takes a father to do that. Mothers have more in common with daughters."

"John upsets his father," she informed.

"In what manner?"

"Well . . . well . . ." She sought around for words to explain it. "He used to trust us implicitly. But now he doesn't. I feel that he views us as amiable liars, though we have done nothing to lose his confidence. He makes enigmatic remarks." She leaned forward. "He isn't *normal.*"

"Is that all?" asked Wilson.

"No. He has a most unpleasant habit of putting pertinent questions at unexpected moments. The same ones over and over again. There is nothing wrong with his memory, so why should he keep asking?" Mrs. Enderby stopped fiddling with her gloves, put them in her handbag, closed it with a loud snap. "He's checking up to see whether my answers are always the same. He's testing my veracity. Sometimes he questions his father by way of additional check. I don't like it."

Wilson said, soothingly, "A healthy child has an active mind and is in-

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tensely curious. Its favorite words are why, who, where and how. That is perfectly natural though it can be awkward at times. You mustn't let it worry you."

"Mustn't I?" She surveyed him a while, estimating him, summing him up, then went on, "Did you ever say to your father, 'How do *I* know that you're my father?' "

"By golly, I'd have lost some basic epidermis if I had!" he assured. Leaning back in his chair, he rubbed his chin. "Did he actually say *that?*"

"Yes."

"And what was your husband's reply?"

"Irrational and emotional, I'm afraid. He flew into an awful rage. I don't blame him a bit. I felt most annoyed too."

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"Of course." Wilson brooded a bit. "How old is John?"

"Fifteen."

He sat up, alert. "My goodness, I thought you were talking about a mere child. Why, he's practically a young man."

"That is why I have come here," said Mrs. Enderby. "He is much too old for such childish questionings and imaginings. Doctor Swain suggested I take him to a specialist and recommended you. He said you would find John an interesting case."

"H'm! Well, I am willing to do what I can. How is your boy making out at school?"

Mrs. Enderby's face cleared, took on a touch of pride. "He is top of his class."

"I half expected that. Problem children usually run to one extreme or the other, sharp-witted or witless. Have you brought him with you?"

"He is waiting in the reception room."

Wilson stood up. "I'll see him right away." He patted her shoulder as he conducted her to the door. "Don't bother yourself over this, Mrs. Enderby. Youth has mental problems peculiarly its own. They are easy to clear up once we get down to the root-cause of them."

"Shall I wait until you've finished with him?"

"No, no." He opened the door, gave her a reassuring smile. "We might be an hour or so and I guess he's plenty big enough to find his own way home." Then he called, "Come in, John, please."

Passing his mother with a rueful grin, John Enderby entered the room and took on the bored expression of one compelled to assist the foolish in their folly.

CLOSING the door, Wilson gave gave him the once-over, finding him a little above medium height, fair haired, with sensitive, intelligent features.

"Lie down there, John." He pointed to an overstuffed couch. "Take it easy. Relax as much as you can."

When the other had obeyed he resumed his seat behind the desk, took a silver pencil from a drawer, prepared to make notes.

"Now, John, let's get something clear at the start. I'm a specialist in mental therapy. Maybe a good one, maybe a bad one. That's for you to judge—and I won't mind if you think me a stinker." He gave a friendly laugh, went on, "But I am not a quack. Neither am I a nosey-poke trying to pry into other people's personal affairs. I'm merely an ordinary individual who likes his fellows, thinks them immensely interesting and earns a living by helping them to get along."

"The approach jovial," remarked John. "Gain the patient's confidence before you tear out his soul."

Wilson blinked, frowned, made a brief note on his scratch-pad. "Peo-

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ple must have some confidence in one another or they would never get anywhere."

"Are they getting anywhere?"

"Let's keep to the task in hand, shall we? I'm only trying to help you. And your mother. She's bothered about you. Mothers are over-sensitive sometimes. She feels hurt."

"Why?"

"Oh, she has plenty of reasons. Probably most of them are imaginary—but not all. For instance, at your age you know quite well that the worst insult you can offer anyone is implication of bastardy. So, when a boy sees fit to question his own parentage—"

"Have you ever questioned yours? asked John, turning his head and looking at him. His eyes were large, luminous and too genuinely curious to arouse resentment.

"No," said Wilson, shortly. "I know my origin."

"You don't," John denied. "You have only your mother's word that she is your mother; your father's that he is your father. And a piece of paper to prove it which is no proof at all."

Slightly irritated, Wilson gave back, "You might as well suggest that I don't know I'm born."

"You don't know that either," asserted John, with devastating confidence. "You've only got other folks' word for it. Secondhand evidence."

"If I had never been born I couldn't be here."

"You could—like me."

"How?"

"Never mind," said John, very politely. He eyed the ceiling and suppressed a yawn.

Two minutes dragged past while Wilson silently stewed it over. He had come across some queer delusions in his time but never anything quite like this.

It is normal and healthy for a boy of seven or eight to think himself Hopalong Cassidy. It is far from normal for a youth of fifteen to doubt his own birth. If one could question that, one could question anything. The eternal verities could be shot to blazes. Crime does not pay. God is love. Matter exists. I am *Me*.

His mind swirled around.

AFTER a time, he resumed in persuasive tones, "See here, John, if you'll co-operate and let me take you back along your own memory-tracks, I think I can prove to your own satisfaction that—"

"You won't get very far, Mr. Wilson," he chipped in.

"Why not?"

"I had a dose of that memory-stuff six months ago. Tried it to check on my own notions. Didn't tell mother, of course." John Enderby shifted around on the couch, grinned to himself. "The auditor got stalled and gave me up."

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"Did he say why?"

"Yes. He said I'd got an irremovable block at age four. Somebody had swiped part of my engram-bank."

Wilson dropped his pencil, felt around for it in fumbling manner, picked it up.

"John, as I get it, you've developed firm and serious doubts about your origin." He was playing for time, feeling strangely uneasy. "Mind telling me how you got that way?"

"Bits fell into place. Sometimes they do, by sheer accident, and then you suddenly see something you'd never thought of before."

"I concede that," gave Wilson. "Quite a few worthwhile inventions have come from haphazard circumstances that lined themselves up and made a new idea. What were your bits?"

"A book and a pig and a bunch of friends."

"Huh?"

"They added up—and the memory-block underlined the result."

"Going to tell me how?" Wilson prodded.

"What's the use? You don't confess to a prison warder how you committed the crime. There's just no point in it." Getting off the couch, he walked to the door. "Sorry, Mr. Wilson, but I think I'm wasting your time and maybe someone else needs it more than me. Mind if I go home?"

Staring at him, Wilson noted the large eyes, the intense light burning within them. Their steady, unblinking gaze gave him the fidgets. He hitched his shoulders to shake off the sensation. No wonder Mrs Enderby showed a mild touch of the heebies. The boy was peculiar, to say the least.

"I would much rather you remained, John. You haven't helped me anything like enough."

"I have not helped you?" He stood with one hand on the door handle, youthfully impatient, giving Wilson the impression that at any moment he would take it on the run.

"You've not helped me sufficiently," Wilson said. "We all need help some time or other and I'm no exception. I've got to live—and in a way I live on other people's ideas."

That ought to do it. Throw himself on the boy's mercy. Flatter his ego.

John hesitated. His hand moved the door a little, opening it gently, closing it again. "Oh, well, I reckon I can stay until three o'clock." Having made up his mind he walked back to the couch, his steps soft and completely silent. He lay down again, repeated with emphasis: "Until three o'clock."

"We'll get a move on, then." Wilson found a handkerchief, wiped eyes that had gone momentarily out of focus. Someday soon, he decided he'd have another check over for

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lasses. "Be candid with me, John. 'ou've nothing to lose and might ave much to gain. Besides, I'm eally interested. Tell me about these its of yours, the book, the pig and ıe friends."

JOHN said, "I'm fond of fantasy fiction. Through it I made contact ith a small bunch of people with milar tastes. We got along fine. irds of a feather."

"Naturally."

"We had something in common. ots of folk haven't got it, but we ad! I spent a long, long time try- ıg to discover precisely what it as we had got, why we were like e were, and in what manner we dif- ered from the broad mass of hu- ıanity."

"And then?"

"One day I found it. Maybe it as inevitable that I should find it ecause all of them were outsiders -and I'm a stranger here myself!" he eyes settled on his listener. "We ere cosmos-conscious."

"Is that all?" asked Wilson, dis- ppointed.

"No. I thought no more of it ntil one day I read a book about ıe operation of the mind. It said ıat the memory stores data all ırough life, some true, some false, ping back almost to time of con- eption. Visual data, tactile data, ıral data, all sorts. Or nearly all. had little to say about one kind data which maybe is the most important of all."

"What kind?"

"Intuitive data. The stuff even baby animals use when they are said to obey their instincts." He paused, suddenly shot a question. "Do you believe in God?"

"Yes," said Wilson, taken aback.

"Why?"

"Well—"

"Your faith is based on intuitive data," declared John, an appallingly old head on young shoulders. "It may be true. It may be false in that it is misconstrued for lack of suitable referents. But it's still intuitive."

"I'll give you that," agreed Wilson, registering no progress but anxious to keep the other going while in a talkative mood. He glanced at the clock. A quarter to three.

"I think certain people are cosmos-conscious because they possess intuitive data denied to others. They *know* the cosmos is inhabited, that there *is* a multitude of sentient worlds. It is in their minds, deep in their memories. That makes them what they are even though they might not realize it."

"Where does the pig come in?" inquired Wilson.

"I read about the pig one day. The story was a true one, in several magazines. It sort of linked up my data and made a picture."

"Tell me of it."

THROWING him an amused glance, John said, "A family

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adopted a newly-born piglet as a pet. They also had two pups. The pig grew up with the pups, saw them become dogs, never met another pig. Now, psychologists are visiting the family to inspect the pig."

"Why?"

"It makes noises halfway between a grunt and a bark and obviously is trying to bark, like the dogs. It chases cats. It eats dog-food. It stops by trees and fire-plugs." He sat up slowly, eyes glowing. "It thinks it is a dog. It has never stumbled over any reasons to think differently."

"A logical consequence, I suppose," Wilson allowed. "But where's the significance, if any?"

"Once I thought I was a human being. I'd never found any reason to think differently."

Wilson came erect, icy coldness on the back of his neck. "Of course you're a human being, you nitwit. And so are all your cosmos-conscious friends."

"Would you dare say anything else?"

"As I understand it," Wilson said, still standing and carefully avoiding the eyes, "you have somehow conceived and nourished a delusion that this world is in a dark conspiracy to fool you and a little flock of non-human friends into thinking you are human beings. How silly! Why should anyone bother? What have they to gain by it?"

"It's their job, or part of their job. Like it's my mother's appointed task to pose as my mother. Someone has to nurse—and watch—the malcontents brought in from outside."

"Jumping Japhet!" Wilson made a derisive gesture. "Do you really believe that you're some other world's sinner who has been punished by being shrunk down to baby-size, dumped on this planet and kidded along until you've served your sentence?"

"Certainly not." John studied the ceiling speculatively. "That is merely one theory out of about forty I've thought up—some more plausible than others. There's *got* to be an explanation of how some have intuitive data withheld from others."

Sitting down, Wilson breathed heavily and gave forth, "Most people are too busy earning a living to waste time pondering the possibility about life in the universe. It's as simple as that!"

"Some of my cosmos-conscious friends are the busiest people I know," John retorted. "They earn livings, and good ones."

"Look, that pig never got hold of a mirror. Surely you can *see* that you are a human being?"

"The resemblance is excellent—as was intended." Then he added, "Outwardly."

Wilson tried another tack. "Let's look at this sensibly. Which do you think is the more logical: to believe a thing because it can be proved,

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or because it cannot be disproved?"

"Apply that to your own beliefs," suggested John, pointedly.

"Never mind mine. We're dealing with yours. What proof have you?"

"One, there's this question of intuitive data. Two, factual data stolen from my engram-bank. Three, lack of consistency in my guardians. Four—"

"What was that last one?"

"Lack of consistency. For example, once mother told me I was born at six in the morning. Another time it was four. Father said five. I weighed eight pounds. Then six and three-quarters. A self-appointed aunt attended my birth. Or maybe two aunts and a cousin."

"That proves nothing but parental muddle-mindedness," Wilson pointed out. "What we need is definite, concrete, self-evident, undeniable proof that you are non-human."

"Not so easy," John admitted with great reluctance. "I am handicapped by human conventions."

"How in heaven's name can that be? Either there is evidence or there is not!"

"ONE can detect and identify differences from the human norm only by measuring oneself against average humans," John pointed out. "But there are human functions and powers never exercised publicly. Convention demands that they be kept private. There's just no way of telling what an ordinary man is able to do and does do when he is entirely alone. Result is that I don't fully know what powers humans possess and therefore have no means of making accurate comparison with himself."

"I don't quite understand," said Wilson, watching him.

"Well, let us suppose for the sake of argument that all humans have pyrotic powers but for some silly reason it is considered indecent to employ them in public, how would I ever get to know they are pyrotics?"

"Are *you* a pyrotic?"

"No, of course not."

"There you are then." Wilson was vaguely peeved. He felt let down. For a moment he had nursed the wild hope that he was about to trap a genuine paranormal, but the hope had been dashed. "Don't you see how utterly absurd all this is? You have a high I.Q. and a first-class imagination which you have permitted to master you under the glib but not-so-plausible stimulus of fantastic literature. I think that—"

"If I am right," interrupted John, "you would take good care to conceal your real thoughts. You would voice false ones calculated to shove me the way you want me to go."

"If you are right, I'd know it, being one of your imaginary multitude of deceivers. I don't know it."

"I can cover that two ways. Your assurance may be false or true. If

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false, it is worthless. If true, it is also worthless—because the dogs did nothing to disillusion the pig!"

"That's irrelevant." Frowning to himself, Wilson had an annoyed chew at his bottom lip. "You're not right and you can't prove you are right." He paused, added, "But I can prove you wrong."

"How?"

"By plain commonsense logic. Look at it this way: a world comprised mostly of human beings would not go to all the tedious trouble of fooling a small quota of non-humans without an excellent motive. Am I right?"

"Yes," admitted John.

"This same motive would impel us to take any measures, no matter how drastic, to prevent the deception from being discovered and exposed."

"Correct."

"Therefore it should be my grim duty to kill you here and now, and thus close your trap for keeps." He emitted a harsh chuckle. "Right?"

"Wrong," said John, cool and self-assured.

"So I'm wrong." Wilson could not conceal his sarcasm. "Would you care to explain how I'm wrong?"

"Certainly. My death would affect the future but not the past. It would not rid this world of any to whom I may already have talked—and also know too much."

"Go on."

"Furthermore, whether human or non-human, I am not unique. If I can think things out all by myself, so can others. My ending would not rid you of the obligation to hunt for others who see what I see."

"Is that all?" Wilson's hand slid into a drawer, felt around until it sensed the cold of a loaded automatic. Somebody was going to take a very poor view of this. The correct technique was to report the matter in complete detail, let others sit in judgment and—if deemed desirable—an unfortunate accident would be arranged. But on a plea of dire necessity he might get away with it. "Is that all?"

"No, Mr. Wilson." The other stirred, sat up, placed hands on knees. "Killing is more easily talked about than done."

"Is it?" He edged the coldness out of the drawer, leveled the automatic at the boy. "Of course you are wrong, as you can see. I not only find it easy to kill you, but find it absolutely necessary."

The boy remained strangely unperturbed. "Then you admit I am right?"

"Of course."

"You would not say that if you thought I'd leave here alive."

"Quite true. So you realize how easy it actually is to kill you?"

"Naturally. If I escaped, the truth would be out, and we 'strangers' would know what to do. Also you must know that we *can* do something, or it would not be absolutely necessary to kill me now when, to maintain the illusion

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ou'd have to be apprehended and unished—which in this state is the lectric chair."

"True."

The boy rose to his feet.

Before he could take a step, Wilon pressed the trigger. The autoatic roared in the stillness of the oom and the boy slumped down, neat hole oozing blood in the enter of his forehead.

The telephone yelped on Wilson's esk, making him suddenly taut ith the shock of it. He gaped at ıe instrument as if he had never een it before, licked his lips, put ıe gun back, closed the drawer.

Picking up the phone, he said, oarsely, "Wilson speaking." His aze rested absently on the tiny isor which slowly swirled and leared.

A voice came through saying, "Sorry I had to walk out on you when I went to the door half an hour back."

"Eh? What was that?"

"I've never seen anyone create a cleavage in public, so maybe it is thought vulgar. If so, I apologize." A brief pause, then, "Anyway, it's three o'clock, Mr. Wilson, and I've had to call my astral body back."

At that point Wilson's eyes finally registered the face in the visor. He dropped the phone as if it were red-hot, shot to his feet, stared at the door which had not opened, the empty couch, the completely empty room.

He didn't say a word. Not a word. Just leaned on his desk while sickness pounded in his stomach and small pearls of sweat broke through his forehead.

:DITORIAL (Concluded)

r later!

If you're gonna write, do it the ıinute you read this. Honest, we'll e on pins and needles with wonderıg when we can grab that phone nd call the printer to say: "Get n the ball, Howard—it's every ıirty days from now on!"

And with that we'll pull in our utstretched hand, stow our tin cup ı our over-night bag, take off our habby begging clothes, and step ıto our golden chariot and whisk way to our palatial office. Yes, ellows and gals, that's what our esk chair and upstairs "office" seems like to us. When we're sitting at this typewriter, talking to you, and making up OTHER WORLDS for your pleasure, we're riding high! We're on top of the world, doing things with our grown-up "fanzine". You might even say we're kinda proud to be closer to you readers than two sheets of paper. Those walnut-paneled offices at Z-D always did kinda frost us. That's why we always took visiting fans down to the coffee shop where we could gab as we pleased. To us, OTHER WORLDS is a coffee cup, and we're right in there with you! —*Rap.*

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THESE ARE MY CHILDREN

(*Conclusion*)

By Rog Phillips

(*Summary of Part I*)

Peter Hart, on his way to New York via air, observes a man who takes a seat beside him. The man introduces himself as Nicholas A[illegible]er, says he knew Peter Har[illegible]ears ago. Peter doesn't recognize him. A girl comes down the aisle, asks if the seat beside Peter is taken. Apparently she doesn't see Archer. Archer gets up, stands in the aisle, lets the girl sit down. In a curious exchange of words, the girl decides

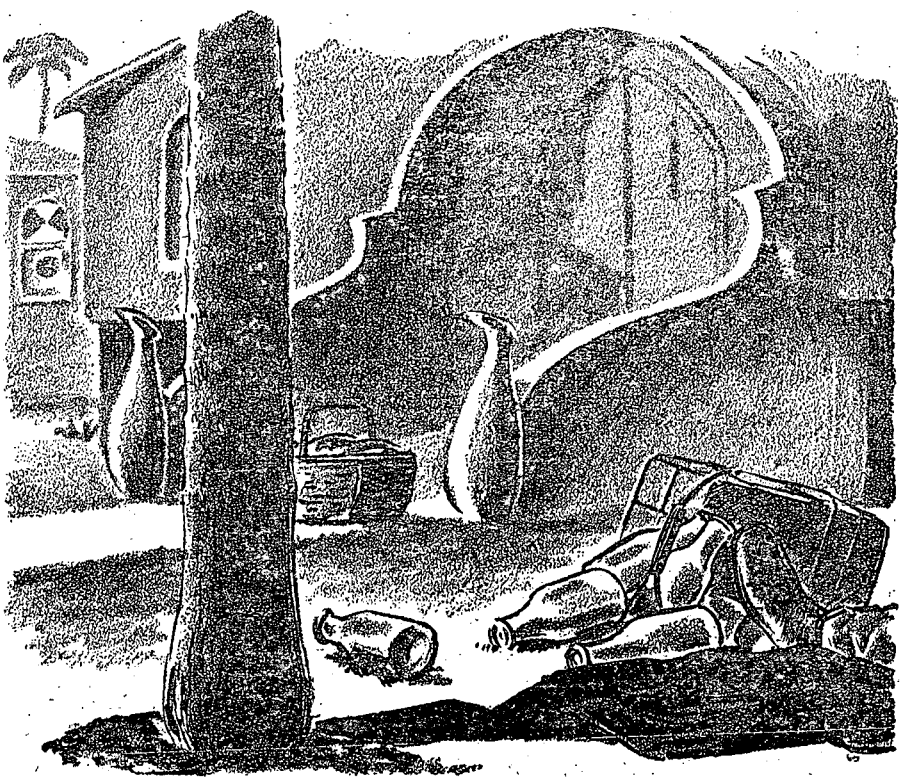

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Illustration by Bill Terry

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Peter is a psychological oddity. She introduces herself as Doris Evans. Annoyed, Peter gets up to go to the men's room. Here he talks to Archer, discovers that Archer is invisible to everyone but Peter. Baffled, he returns to his seat. In the ensuing conversation with Doris, he makes a dinner date for that evening in New York.

At the terminal, he makes a phone call, asks for a fictitious name, disguising his voice. At the information that he has the wrong number, he hangs up, satisfied. Then, in the phone booth, he assembles the parts of a mysterious and deadly looking little gun.

He asks Doris to take his luggage to the hotel while he goes on an errand. Then he gets into a taxi. He finds Archer sitting beside him. Resigned to the invisible man, he invites him to go along, and then go to the hotel with him. Arriving at his business destination, Archer waits in the cab while Peter calls on Ralph Dexter. As Dexter opens the door, Peter shoots him and kills him.

He leaves by another exit, walks along, dissembling and strewing the parts of the gun in convenient widely scattered places. They will never be taken for a murder weapon.

At dinner that night Doris buys an evening paper, traps Peter into admitting he knew Ralph Dexter. She accuses him of murder. Archer, standing beside Peter, tells him he's trapped. His perfect crime isn't perfect at all. Doris leaves the table, saying she'll be back in a minute. When she returns, she informs him she intends to call the police. He excuses himself, goes to the men's washroom, once more to talk to the invisible Mr. Archer. He agrees that he has decided to kill Doris. Archer says he won't get away with it.

Returning to the table, Doris has gone. She has left a note with the waiter. But Peter rushes out, ignoring the note. He overtakes Doris, draws her into a dark doorway, strangles her to death.

Confident he hasn't been seen, he goes to his hotel, but is picked up at the door. The waiter is there to identify him. The note had said she was going to Police before he found a way to kill her to prevent her from revealing that he'd killed Dexter. Peter tries to escape, but fails, is roughly shaken up by the police . . .

. . . and finds himself sitting in the plane, bound for New York. In some strange way Time has turned back on itself, and he has the whole deed to do over again!

Beside him sits a woman who seems strangely familiar. But she is not Doris Evans. She tells him he has been having a nightmare, apparently, which is why she shook him to awaken him. Nicholas Archer is not in sight.

Arriving at the Terminal, Peter calls Ralph Dexter. Then he goes

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to his room, tells him he will no longer pass on United States guided missile secrets, that he's quitting the spy business. He tells Dexter of his dream, shows him the gun, assembles it. Dexter tests it against the wall, notes its soundless effectiveness. He is amazed. Dexter tells Peter he may go. He says he will do nothing. Peter leaves, running down the stairs two at a time.

Doris Evans, hidden outside in the hall, watches his departure with puzzled eyes. Then she enters Dexter's apartment, in time to see him disappearing down the fire escape. She follows, but Dexter has escaped. The F.B.I. has lost its big quarry again.

Peter, adopting the name of Alfred Blanning, flees New York on the next available plane, bound for Cincinnati.

Doris Evans, consulting with Herbert Carter, her fellow F.B.I. man, tells him of Peter Hart's mysterious dream which she has overheard. They wonder who Nicholas Archer is, how Peter knew the disguised woman beside him was really Doris Evans; although she hadn't told him her name, etc. Bugs Calahan, a third operative, phones to inform the two that Peter has gone to Cincinnati as Alfred Blanning. Operative Nichols also phones to say there are no clues in the Dexter apartment. Prints do not check with any known criminal.

Father Sprague, at his mission in China, is approached by a man who introduces himself as Nicholas Archer. He says he knows Father Sprague, from his childhood, but Sprague does not remember him. Archer tells Father Sprague of the coming of the Communists to the village, and of his coming death. He advises Father Sprague to flee. Father Sprague refuses. Just then the Communists come. Father Sprague and several hundred townspeople are herded into an enclosure and slaughtered. Father Sprague falls, everything going black . . .

. . . and wakes to find himself sitting on the bench at his mission, Time having seemed to have doubled back on itself. The Reds have not yet arrived. Convinced of the folly of remaining, because of his vision, Father Sprague flees.

He goes to Cardinal Blank in Singapore, resigns as a priest, because he is convinced the only way to fight Communism and its tenet that the human soul is a myth, is to prove scientifically that man has a soul. He feels that the Church's lack of effort to prove their tenet means the Reds have logic on their side and will eventually triumph.

Bill Nichols gains the friendship of Peter Hart, and eventually introduces his "sister", Doris. The idea is to trap Peter into telling what he knows of Dexter, and thus getting the arch-spy. They are in a restaurant having coffee when Father Sprague, no longer dressed as a priest, comes in. Peter finally recog-

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nizes Doris, asks if she knows Nicholas Archer. He thinks he hears Nicholas Archer's voice. But no one is near—except Father Sprague, who sits down beside them and introduces himself. In the course of conversation, which turns to the problem of proving the existence of the human soul, Father Sprague tells of his vision of Nicholas Archer. Instantly the three are bonded to him, and before they leave the restaurant, they agree to pool resources in the great search.

Years later, Helen Arbright, having been injured in an accident, has been told she may never have children. This causes friction between her and her husband, George. On this morning, he opens the front door to go to work, discovers a basket on the porch. It contains a baby. Delighted, they agree to keep it, move to a new city, say nothing. But strangely, the milkman has left four quarts of milk instead of the usual one . . .

Dr. Fletcher, of the University of California, calls on the editor of the Sunday Times. He asks about a picture of some bird-shaped plants in the Sunday section, and is refused information. In 1978 publishing any picture without permission makes a paper liable to a damage suit. This picture has been published without permission, through carelessness. But Dr. Fletcher insists, and eventually, by guaranteeing to pay all damage suits, learns where the strange flowers exist.

He calls on a neighbor, Mrs. Robertson, ostensibly to see her hybrid roses, but turns in at the Arbright place as if by mistake. Before he is told to leave, he sees some strange pansies, and a little boy's face at the window.

At the Robertson's, next door, he is introduced to the gardener, Ted. Inspecting the roses, Fletcher learns several strange things. The Arbright lawn never needs mowing, the Arbright boy was told, as a joke, to plant birdseed—only it grew to birdlike flowers, as in the Sunday Times story. Fletcher also spots some black roses in the Robertson garden. Ted breaks down, tells him the boy next door caused it by simply commanding them to be black. Arthur Arbright, the boy, appears now, and Fletcher talks to him. The boy insists he has the strange power, and Fletcher, who is a little man, asks Arthur if he will do something for him he's always wanted. He wants to grow, to be a tall man! Arthur agrees. The birdseed flowers ARE birds, the pansies ARE little people—Arthur wished them so!

George Ashbrook, Dean of Psychology at the University, is amazed when Dr. Fletcher begins to grow. Fletcher tells him of Arthur, his bird-flowers, his lawn that needs no cutting, his living-pansies, his black roses. The proof is in his own new growth. They decide to investigate.

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A visit to Judge Freemont of the juvenile court gives them a means to investigate without arousing suspicion. They learn that the Arbright boy is not the Arbright's child at all.

A visit to the Arbrights brings a confession. At revelation of the date the child was left on their doorstep, August 14, 1969, Judge Freemont recalls that it was the same day approximately 800 other babies were left on doorsteps all over the country. Were all these babies the same KIND of babies, with these extraordinary powers of mind over matter?

Visiting several of the children they can locate, one, Joan Condon, can heal wounded robins, injured by cats, almost instantly, and all cats are now killed by hordes of dogs "because Joan asked them to do it". Another, Lin Baker, has become an introvert, and can control his body deformity so as not to have to go to school, and can read minds and telepath over a distance.

One night Ashbrook and Freemont receive an emergency call from the Robertson home. Dr. Fletcher has met with an accident. They arrive to find him unconscious. Ted, the gardener, says he and Arthur and Fletcher were in the garden when Ted saw a hand and arm floating in the air. The hand entered Dr. Fletcher's head, and Fletcher fell. Arthur ran away.

Fletcher is contorted, one half of his body in paralysis. The doctor who is called in says it is a brain injury. Fletcher is taken to the hospital for an emergency brain operation. Ashbrook finds Arthur, takes him along. Arthur tells how he wanted, out of curiosity, to see what would happen if he touched Dr. Fletcher's brain, as he often did to dogs to scare them. He says he does this by imagining an arm and a hand which he can control mentally, with which he did the touching. Arthur is very upset, as he didn't mean to harm his friend.

During the operation, Dr. Fletcher dies. Arthur is unable to help, using his strange ability to control matter mentally, because he doesn't know what it is necessary to do to repair the damage. After all, he is just a little boy. The brain surgeon, Dr. Beaumont, says it was as though a hand had scrambled Fletcher's brains. He is obviously disturbed by what his operation has revealed, and says this is one of the times when logic fails . . .

Ashbrook and Freemont decide these children are too dangerous to be left alone. They must be rounded up and studied and raised together. Their power is too great to be uncontrolled. For instance, what if they turned their power to atomic energy? Unwittingly, they could destroy the Earth. And KNOWINGLY, when they grow up . . . THERE WOULD BE NO LIMIT TO WHAT THEY COULD DO!

Now go on with the story:

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"MR. Carter will see you now," the beautiful blonde said, smiling impersonally.

"Thanks," George Ashbrook exploded in relief, standing up.

He went in the direction indicated and came to a frosted glass door that bore the simple legend, *Herbert Carter*. He hesitated, then knocked. A well modulated voice said, "Come in."

He opened the door and closed it behind him, and took the seat the somewhat baldishly gray haired, cleanshaven, and prosperously fleshy man behind the desk indicated.

"You're Dr. George Ashbrook, doctorate in psychology at the University of Washington," the F.B.I. Director said. He folded his hands on the desk. "What seems to be your trouble, Doctor?" He smiled. "Must be pretty important for you to refuse to tell anyone but me in person . . ."

"My insistence wasn't due to the importance of the thing," Ashbrook said, his smile brief and nervous. "Frankly, I don't expect to be believed at first, and I couldn't see myself being shoved around by unbelieving underlings who would almost certainly put me down as a crackpot."

Carter shook his head. "In the Federal Bureau of Investigation no one is considered a crackpot until he's proven to be one," he said. "You would have received the same careful attention from any of my assistants. But since you're here go ahead and tell me all about it." He took out an expensive cigar, clipped the end off, and leaned back in his chair, lighting it with the air of a man who has every intention of listening carefully for an indefinite period.

Ashbrook took a deep breath. "It's about the children," he said. "The ones left on doorsteps on August the fourteenth, nineteen sixty-nine. You've heard of them, of course."

"N-no . . ." Carter said, frowning in thought. "This is June seventh, seventy-eight. That would be nine years ago, about?"

"Yes," Ashbrook said. "One of the professors, Fletcher, discovered one of them. He's—was—a botanist. But Arthur—that's the child—accidentally killed him. That's why I'm here. Fletcher, Judge Freemont, and I were keeping it to ourselves until we could learn more about them. You see, they have unusual powers. They may not even be human beings in the strict sense of the word. Oh," as Carter began to grin past his cigar, "I know I'm telling it rather badly, but there isn't any way to acquaint you with it except to cover all the ground one way or another . . ."

"Go right ahead," Carter said kindly.

"I think I'll try to give you some idea of the powers of these children," Ashbrook said after a moment. "In some way they have di-

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rect thought control over matter. The way Dr. Fletcher said Arthur put it was, 'I just told the rose bush to make black roses and it did.' Fletcher was a small man, five feet one, I think. He asked Arthur to make him grow, and he did grow, until he was a little over six feet tall. That's the kind of power these children have, from the three we have been able to locate. But it's dangerous. Like a child's ability to light a match. The lighted match can burn itself out, or set a piece of paper on fire, or burn down a house. In the hands of a child who doesn't understand fully the consequences of his acts, I mean. And that's what happened when Arthur killed Dr. Fletcher. He didn't mean to, and it's probably marred his life from the guilt complex it created."

"How did he do it?" Carter said, making a mental note to find out if a Dr. Fletcher had died recently in Seattle.

"The way he describes it," Ashbrook said, "when he wants to touch something inside something else he imagines he has another arm and hand, and has the finger of that hand do the touching. Ted the gardener saw that hand materialize, and Dr. Beaumont says a small spot on Fletcher's brain was bruised as though a finger had pressed against it." He smiled again nervously. "Judge Freemont and I thought at first it might be the aliens who left the children, coming back to see how they were, and deliberately killing Fletcher because he had found out about Arthur. But Arthur told us he did it, so it couldn't have been them."

Carter had reached forward and pressed two white buttons on a board fastened to the side of his desk.

"If you don't object," he said, "I'm going to ask two of my assistants in to listen to your story with me. They've had considerable experience along the lines indicated by what I've heard so far. Their names are Calahan and Nichols."

* * *

"CALAHAN will meet you at the airport this evening," Carter said two hours later. "He'll go to Seattle with you."

"Thanks," Ashbrook said, "and . . ." He hesitated. "I just wanted to say that I'm intensely interested in this thing. If the Government does track down all these children and place them in a foundation of some sort I could resign from the university and devote all my time to it."

"I was hoping you would say that," Carter said. "Of course we would hope to count on you since you seem to be the only one with any real experience with these children."

Ashbrook shook hands all around, and left. Carter went back around his desk and sat down, looking at

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Calahan and Nichols with raised eyebrows.

The phone rang. He scooped it up and listened briefly.

"That was telegraphed confirmation from the University of Washington," he explained. "Ashbrook is head of the psychology school there. Nothing wrong with him." He took out a fresh cigar and concentrated his gaze on the task of clipping its end. "This takes me back to Doris and Pete," he said. "When's the last we heard from Doris?"

"I was out to see them on my vacation last year," Nichols said. "As her 'brother' all three of them have written me occasionally at a Los Angeles address where they're forwarded. I'll get their letters." He left the room and returned with them.

"Say anything about their work?" Carter asked, studying them.

"Nothing much. Sprague, the ex-priest, is determined to isolate the human soul. Pete is fired with the same zeal, and they've been trying everything under the sun. If they ever had any concrete results I never was told. Doris is perfectly happy just being married to Pete, but also she's loyal to us. She's never told him she was with the F.B.I., and he still thinks his turning secrets over to Ralph Dexter was never exactly found out."

"Dexter," Carter said. "I wonder where he is, who he is. So far as we know only Pete could identify him by sight. His fingerprints didn't match any of the commies we rounded up when hostilities broke out in sixty . . . I'll tell you what you do, Bill. Take a two weeks vacation and visit your 'sister'. Find out anything you can. It's entirely possible, you know, that Pete and the ex-priest made some discovery and decided on some grand experiment, and are in some way in back of this thing Ashbrook was telling us about."

Calahan hooked a leg over the corner of the desk and sat down. "There's another possibility," he said. "About half the Kremlin simply vanished when the war ended, and so did some of the Russian scientists. Russia was experimenting in all sorts of things like mad. Leaving eight hundred babies, all born about the same time, on doorsteps all on the same morning smacks of more organization than —"

Carter interrupted him with a "Damn! Why didn't I think of the connection. Ralph Dexter could have found Peter Hart and gotten a new hold on him. This whole thing could be Commy inspired and masterminded. Pete and the ex-priest could have made some discovery, and Dexter could be using it while keeping them quiet." He frowned at Nichols. "Be damn careful out there. The broken up Russian states are rather tottery. So is Democratic China. If a rejuvenation of communism could spring up in this country, backed by a new generation of supermen, it would

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sweep the world. Especially if it had old Kremlin names at the head."

"I take it you don't put much stock in this alien stuff," Calahan said dryly.

"Nuts," Carter snorted. "We've been to the Moon, Mars, Venus, and have closeups of the other planets from the Moon telescopes. There aren't any aliens. Get busy on your separate angles and keep me informed over M2. Meanwhile I'll put the office staff onto the job of locating as many of those other August the fourteenth quiz kids as possible."

* * *

BILL Nichols drove his car from Washington D.C., reaching Flagstaff the middle of the second afternoon after an overnight stop at Tulsa. It was an easy trip over the six lane superhighway, cutting up from the Capitol to where the New York end merged with it in Pennsylvania, staying in the 150 mph lane most of the way, catching a glimpse of St. Louis to the south as he crossed the intercontinental bridge just beyond the point where the Chicago branch hooked in, then curving gently south through cut-down Ozark territory to Tulsa. From there the highway had gone monotonously straight across Oklahoma, New Mexico and the Texas Panhandle, following for the most part the old 66 highway. And by the time he reached the outskirts of Flagstaff he was no longer Bill Nichols anywhere in his mind. He was Bill Evans, Doris's brother, a rather no good car salesman who liked to drink.

He hopped into the proper lanes as he reduced speed, and shortly was off the highway, scooting through one of the departure lanes to brake to a crawling forty on a Flagstaff parkway.

Parking, he had a light lunch and then called the Hideout, as it was laughingly referred to by Doris. And it was her voice that answered.

"Hi sis," Bill said affectionately. "I'm in Flagstaff. Be out in half an hour or less. Okay?"

"Bill!" her voice sounded in a delighted shriek. Then as an aside, "It's Bill . . . I don't know. It's probably his vacation." Into the phone, "I hope you can stay a couple of weeks, Bill. By the way, will you pick up some groceries and bring them along like a good little brother?"

Because of the shopping it was over an hour before he turned off the Jerome road along a precarious lane toward the isolated brick and concrete buildings that were his destination.

He drove slowly as he came near, his eyes searching the landscape carefully. On the surface he would be old Bill, the irresponsible brother, but underneath, this time, he would be using all his powers of observation.

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To the west the sun was a bloated red globe just above the haze that crowned the naked hills. As he made the last turn into the grounds Doris appeared on the run, her hand waving a greeting. He smiled and returned her wave. In her mind he was probably her brother by now. It was a nice relationship.

As he got out of the car and caught her in his arms he saw Pete and Sprague emerge from one of the one-storied workshops. From there on it was a typical glad meeting. He assured them he could stay at least two weeks provided he could run into Flagstaff and tank up when he chose. There was laughter, then they were moving into the house with the groceries and his bags, and he was finally left to himself in the guest room to freshen up a bit before dinner.

And, he decided when he was alone, the three of them hadn't acted as though they had some deep dark secret hidden away.

The guest room had been done over since he had last been here. Mint green walls with ice blue ceiling, and the windows had been knocked out as well as most of the north wall to make way for the new laminated glasswall stuff he had heard about but never noticed anywhere else. It could be perfectly transparent, a softly luminous sheet of glowing illumination, or an opaque blackness at the push of a button.

It wasn't until he had stepped out of the shower and was dressing that anything happened, and then it wasn't anything tangible.

It was a strange sensation of being *touched*. Not by anything physical. After it left him he noticed that the hair on his arms was standing up.

He stared at it. In his mind was a dismayed feeling that something had found out all about him in that brief contact. He shook himself to dispel the feeling and told himself not to let his imagination play tricks on him.

The realization that a week earlier he would have put it all down to cooling off from the shower made him feel better.

* * *

"HOW'VE things been, Bill?" Pete asked as they all sat down to the table.

"So so," Bill said. "Beer bill sixty a month, gas bill ten a month income seventy-five a month after taxes." He grinned. "Discovered whether you have a soul yet?" He saw the quick glance that passed between Pete and Sprague.

"We're making progress," Pete said.

"Progress," Bill snorted. "Let's see now, twenty-eight years since you started isn't it? By now you either have or you haven't."

Pete shrugged and didn't accept the conversational bait. Eating began. Doris asked Bill how things

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vere in Los Angeles. He gave a ague fictitious accounting of things hat would be in character.

With the meal over he abruptly lecided to take the initiative. "By he way," he said in half humorous omplaint, "while I was dressing fter my shower *something* sent hills through me and made the air on my arms stand up. I hope ou will give your ghosts strict rders to leave me alone. I mean t."

Once again he saw something pass etween Pete and Sprague almost oo quickly to catch. But Doris vas just staring at him with mock stonishment. He decided she wasn't n on their secrets.

"Must have been the aircondi-ioning," Sprague said.

"No it wasn't the airconditioning," Bill said. "It could give me oosepimples, but not make the air on my arms stand up." He tared at Pete with open suspicion. I'll bet you've figured out a way o talk with the dead."

"How about a beer, Bill?" Doris aid with supreme practicality.

"Don't change the subject," he aid. "Sure I'll have a beer. You idn't have to ask me." He turned ack to Pete with the doggedness f an obnoxious brother-in-law. Have you or haven't you contacted he dead?"

"Let me tell him," Sprague said, is voice deep and soft. He turned o Bill. "You see, Bill, the expres-on, 'contact the dead', is somewhat meaningless, though I know exactly what you mean. You want to know if we have been able to talk by means of some electronic device with a soul that was once a living person. In the same manner that you might say that you are right now contacting and being contacted by us. But it isn't that simple. It's more like the distinction you might make when you say you've seen a famous screen actor. You could mean on the screen or in person. Or take the voice. You might hear Bing Crosby's voice off a phono disc, a tape, a wire, or a sound track on a screen reel. Or in person if he's still alive. I don't know. I haven't paid much attention to the outside world lately."

"Are you leading up to telling me you have a recording of Caruso?" Bill jeered goodnaturedly.

Sprague smiled patiently. "Suppose I were to tell you we have definitely contacted the dead in several different forms? But none of them the form we are searching for?"

"Huh?" Bill said blankly, while behind his veiled eyes he studied the two men.

"He's pulling your leg, Bill," Pete said dryly, grinning at Doris as she brought in a can of beer for her 'brother'. "But what he's leading up to is a long lecture on the difficulties we have to face."

"Precisely," Sprague said. But there was a mocking light behind his eyes. "What is the soul? Is it

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material so that instruments can detect it?"

"It has to be if it exists," Bill said.

"Perhaps and perhaps not," Sprague said. "I'll give you an example. I'll make it simple. You assume that the ideas and thought processes and awarenesses that you lump together as being you all exist inside your skull. In your brain, to be exact."

"Don't they?" Bill asked, sipping the beer.

"Let's suppose they do and they don't," Sprague said. "Suppose we take the analogy of the carbon copy."

"A business firm," he went on, "keeps carbons of all papers. Some companies such as insurance companies may keep more than one carbon and keep complete collections in separate places. I believe during the last war many businesses did that. If an atom bomb were dropped on the main office, destroying every scrap of paper, their entire records continued to exist intact in a branch office vault."

"Sure," Bill frowned. "But what's that . . ."

"Let's suppose that there exists a form of telepathy in the human race," Sprague said. "Let's suppose that each element of your mind, besides being stored inside your skull, is also stored in someone else's skull."

"Oh," Bill said, putting disappointment into his tone. "I suppose you're going to try to tell me that's the cause of cases of split personality."

"Not at all," Sprague said. "I was going to say, suppose these duplicate mental elements were not all in one other brain, but scattered all over. Take your own mind, for example. Under this theory one element might be stored in your brother-in-law's brain, another in mine, another in the brain of a drugstore clerk in New York, another in the brain of a Chinese in Manchuria, and so on. And if they were all connected into an integrated whole by a common wavelength they would persist as *you* after your death. And if one of these alternate repositories died, the worst it could mean for you would be the permanent forgetting of one small memory."

Bill stared at Sprague with feigned blankness for a minute while he digested this. Then he chuckled. "Neat," he said. "I see what you're trying to do. Alibi your failure. If that's the setup you could still insist there's a soul, and say there's no material way to contact it."

"On the contrary," Sprague said, smiling. "But to go on with the explanation, let's call this vast storehouse interconnected by unconscious telepathy the mind plane. Then on the mind plane would exist enormous numbers of integrated minds of people who are dead. Its material vehicle is the vast field of

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brains of the entire human race. And assuming this is a true picture, if you were to die right now you would wake up on this mind plane and be aware, and perhaps not even know you were dead!"

Bill sipped his beer, his thoughts whirling.

"You wouldn't know where you were," Sprague continued, "and in fact you would be in millions of places, so far as the material your elements were embodied in is concerned. And if you could at will become aware of physical reality through the senses of any human repository of your psyche, you could be any place with the speed of thought. And if, here and there, was a person with the ability to *step aside* from control of himself and become passive, you could perhaps take control and move and talk as if it were your own body. Such a person would, of course, be the conventional psychic medium."

Bill gulped the last of his beer at that, and looked questioningly at Doris who rose hastily and went for another. He smiled at her departing back. She, knowing he was an F.B.I. man, was probably wondering why he was drawing Sprague and Pete out by egging them on. Or did she know why? If these three were connected with those August the fourteenth kids she had probably already guessed. He looked back at Sprague and Pete sharply. Maybe they knew too. Maybe they knew by now he wasn't Doris's brother. Maybe they were playing with him.

"That is one theory of immortality," Sprague went on. "It has much in the way of evidence to confirm it. It *could* be the true material basis of continuation of the soul after death. But there is a modified version of that same theory that could equally hold. Since, in this theory, brain matter is the physical field upon which the mind plane holds its embodiment, and all creatures have brain matter, the mind plane could conceivably include the brains of dogs and cats and all other animals, and perhaps even insects. That would explain the fact that dogs and other animals are notably more psychic than the average human."

"But where is that getting us?" Bill said, trying to struggle up from the storm of ideas this talk was creating in him. "Don't tell me you've been working on some telepathy machine to track down the components of this hypothetical soul in all its various repositories!"

"Hardly," Sprague said. "Look at it from the other direction. In one single mind or brain may be elements of a thousand existing and integrated minds of no longer physically existing people. Through these those people might be contacted."

"And you can do that?" Bill said, trying desperately to pin something down.

"Perhaps," Sprague said. "Imagine the possibilities. Some mental

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elements might have been transplanted and retransplanted. Fragments of minds of people dead thousands of years could be called to conscious expression through one individual brain . . ." He waited while Bill sighed deeply, then added, "but even though this mind plane may exist, it isn't what we have been looking for. You see, it would be only as immortal as aggregate life on the planet. If the Earth were destroyed and all life on it, then that mind plane would go too."

Pete said, "We're looking for something more basic. Something that can be completely divorced from living brains and still exist as an integrated mind."

"And have you found it?" Bill asked, thinking of what Ashbrook had said about Arthur Arbright and his powers.

"We don't know," Sprague said. And the way he said it made Bill catch his breath.

Sprague stood up abruptly. "It's time for me to retire," he said. "I'll see you in the morning Bill. And," he grinned, "pleasant dreams."

* * *

BILL awakened with a feeling of having been tricked. He was refreshed. There had been not so much as even an ordinary dream. He lit a cigaret and lay back with his head cupped in his locked hands, recalling what Sprague had said the night before. It was a nice theory.

There was only one thing wrong with it, he decided. How could millions of brains be interconnected by telepathy so that the mind plane as Sprague called it would work? He had said that all the elements of one mind, however scattered, would be on one wavelength and act in unison. That was a little far fetched even if one granted the possibility. There just couldn't be that many wavelengths of any kind of energy, so separated that they wouldn't interfere with one another.

He got up and put on his bathrobe. A few minutes later he went out to the kitchen.

Doris greeted him with a smile. "Have a good sleep, Bill?"

"Disappointingly good. What's for breakfast?"

"Anything you like. Ham and eggs?"

"Okay." He sat down in the breakfast nook. "Where're the boys? Out in their workshop?"

"Yes," Doris said. She busied herself at the stove, and without looking at him asked, "Why are you here? And don't tell me there isn't a reason. I can tell. Your eyes are too shrewd this time."

"Does it show that much?" Bill said in dismay. "Maybe they noticed too."

"I don't think so," Doris said. "Even if they did they have no idea what you are."

"Exactly what progress have they made on their research?" Bill ask-

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ed. "Frankly, I'm here to find out, this time."

"Answering that would take all morning. Why don't you tell me enough so I can know what you're driving at?"

"Think back about nine or ten years," Bill said slowly. "Were there any visitors here about then that might possibly have been—Ralph Dexter?" He heard her sharply indrawn breath at the sound of the name. When she didn't answer he said, "Well?"

"I've been trying to remember," she said. "We have a few visitors. Quite a few if you lump them over a period of several years. Some are men and some are women. Generally people who want to donate money to the cause. You'd be surprised how many people have heard of Father Sprague the ex-priest who has devoted his life to isolating the human soul in the laboratory. His prophecy that the Vatican would fall in the last war made him famous."

"Are you stalling?" Bill asked sharply. "You would have known. You're too sharp for Dexter to have come here without you being able to tell from Pete's reactions."

She turned to face him, her eyes grave. "Pete's been upset by lots of visitors, but they've always been the type who donated five hundred dollars and then got sore when the soul wasn't isolated in six months. I'd completely forgotten about Ralph Dexter, and I've been trying to think if one of those cases could have been he." She looked at him speculatively. "What's happened? Something must have for you to think . . ."

"Let's go at it from another angle," Bill said. "Pete and Sprague probably keep you informed of what they're trying. Have they done any experimenting with heredity? Have they, for example, found some method to cause an unborn child to acquire unusual gifts of the type called extrasensory?"

"Mind readers?"

"Perhaps," Bill said. "Specifically, ability to affect matter by the mind. Make ordinary rose bushes grow black roses. Make a short person grow a foot. Maybe even *kill* by thought?"

Doris puckered her lips in a silent whistle. "Now I can see a picture that tells me why the F.B.I. is suddenly interested in Pete again, and Ralph Dexter." She frowned. "But no, I'm afraid I can't help you. Nothing like that could have come out of this laboratory. I'm sure of that."

* * *

CARTER clamped down on his cigar, his narrowed eyes on Bill. "Then you're convinced they could have had nothing to do with the kids?"

"I'm as sure as I could ever be of anything," Bill said. "You should see their setup. They have instruments that I'll bet no one else in

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the world ever heard of. They've made discoveries that any charlatan would use to make a fortune. But Ralph Dexter hasn't been there, and neither Pete nor Sprague has been away from there long enough at any time to have had anything to do with bringing eight hundred babies into the world that have the powers these kids seem to have."

"Well, that's that then," Carter said. "We have to look elsewhere for the cause. Meanwhile we're going ahead on locating all those children. We're turning them up half a dozen a day now. Calahan verified every detail of Ashbrook's story." An amused light glinted in his eyes. "He says those three doctors that tried to save Fletcher are badly shaken up behind their front of cagey authority. They didn't get together on their diagnoses."

Bill remained quiet while Carter took his cigar out of his mouth and studied its lighted end absently.

"We're having a little meeting tomorrow night, Bill," he said after a moment. "The President and a few others. I'd like you to sit in on it, though I don't think anything about Sprague and Peter Hart would do anything more than confuse issues. It will be in our conference room. Be here at eight. Until then you can do anything you like."

* * *

BILL sat back and listened. Carter spent half an hour building up the picture for those in the room, then turned things over to Calahan.

Calahan reported everything he had seen.

"Now I'd like to tell you about some things I didn't see," he said. "Ashbrook seems a pretty level headed man. He and I had several talks, and during those talks he gave me a picture of what he's concluded from his personal study and observation of these three children. His conclusions may be false, but if they aren't—well—in my opinion we can't afford to discount their possibility.

"He's got a theory that all this mental stuff isn't done by some new form of energy at all." He smiled. "Here's where his psychology comes in. He says it may be that matter may not be entirely material as we've thought it to be. Maybe there's something mental underlying it, so that there is actually something underlying mind and matter that is common to both. Then, as he explains it, there would be a substratum of psychological law operating in matter behind the physical laws that scientists deal with and understand. In other words, he says, these children are able to tap something in nature more basic than natural laws. Something that can actually change natural laws. Set them aside in the same way you might fix a traffic ticket.

"He thinks this is more revolu-

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tionary than the atom bomb and nuclear motors, and potentially far more dangerous to us. As he put it, there's nothing that says any one of these children can't in time make ordinary matter blow up like plutonium and blow up the whole world.

"One more thing. And on this I agree with him. He says that if only one or two of these children had appeared it wouldn't be such a bad thing. But the way they showed up, and the very number of them, speaks of some hidden and well laid plan by persons or beings unknown. *He* thinks it must be alien creatures from some source outside the Earth. That's open to question, but there's no question that this is a deliberate attempt of something to *interfere with the normal course of events of the human race,* and as such it's exceedingly suspicious."

The President cleared his throat. "It seems this Dr. Ashbrook knows more about this than anyone else. What does he propose as a course of action to deal with this possible threat to our safety?"

"He isn't too sure," Calahan said. "He says that whatever left those children on those doorsteps could have carefully thought out what our reactions would be and planned on us reacting certain ways. For example, the intention may have been to have them drop from public attention and eventually grow up and seize control of everything. Or it may have been for us to discover them when they were about eight years old and their abilities were just developing, and bring them together and raise them the rest of the way under controlled conditions. So whatever we do or don't do may be playing right into the hands of these unknown parties. But this scheme would be to build some sort of center for raising them well away from everything, and have it mined with explosives so that if they ever become a threat they can be destroyed all at once."

"Has he done any speculating on the possible motives of the . . . er . . . unknown parties?" the President asked.

"Plenty, sir," Calahan said. "The mildest theory he's concocted is that it's an alien race that simply left them here until they grow up—if they grow up without destroying everything. Then when they're grown this alien race will drop a spaceship and pick them all up and fly away. He call it the Cowbird idea. A Cowbird lays its eggs in another bird's nest so it doesn't have to hatch them itself.

"Another — he doesn't seriously consider it himself—is that one of our ships was contaminated by radio actives, and the crew had shoreleave . . ." There was a polite wave of chuckling. "But, the theory I think has most chance of being true is that some scientist discovered a way of mutating the human race to give it these new powers.

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Maybe the deposed Soviet leaders who vanished had already developed this, came to this country, and are using these children eventually to take over our government, and then they can come out in the open again. With them in control here it would be a cinch for them to rule the world, since with Russia broken up the United States could whip any combination that could be formed."

"I see," the President said. Suddenly he turned keen eyes on Bill. "Who is this gentleman?" he asked. "Why is he here?"

Carter answered respectfully. "He's just one of my operatives. I invited him to listen in."

The President smiled. "Isn't that a trifle suspicious under the circumstances, Mr. Carter? Surely you must have had a stronger reason. What's your name? Stand up so we can see you better."

"My name is William Nichols, Mr. President," Bill said, standing up.

"Why are you here?"

"The chief told the truth," Bill said. "He invited me to listen in."

"Why?"

"Go ahead and tell him, Bill," Carter growled, his face flushed.

"When Ashbrook came to the chief I was assigned to look into another possible aspect of the case," Bill said. "My end didn't develop anything. That's all."

"I surmised as much," the President said. "I think I could guess what your assignment was. Mr. Carter naturally knows pretty much of what's going on in this world, and he immediately fastened suspicion on some scientist or group of scientists as being possibly connected with this deal. He had you investigate them. Right?"

Bill looked at Carter who dipped his head.

"That's right, sir."

"We're going to adjourn this meeting now," the President said. "Before we do, however, I want to say this: you three men are going to be thoroughly questioned before a committee I'm going to appoint. That committee will be composed mostly of men from the Pentagon. If at all feasible we're going to get these children together as Dr. Ashbrook suggests. And we're going to find out who brought them into existence, and why. Major Smith, you will be in charge of the committee. I'll see you tomorrow in my office."

* * *

"GOD!" Carter groaned, clamping into his cigar and staring out the window of his office. "Sometimes I have a strong urge to resign and go into something sensible."

Bill Nichols and Bugs Calahan smiled at each other, but there were angry glints in their eyes also.

"You have to hand it to Major

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Smith, anyway," Calahan said. "If it weren't for him it'd be all over the front pages."

Carter turned away from the window. He chuckled dryly. "Well, that's bureaucracy for you. But they did get an appropriation pushed through for fifty million dollars to build and run the foundation, and they did get a hurry-up Supreme Court finding that those poor kids are aliens, so they can be rounded up and put there. Six months from now it will all be running smoothly."

"What hurts me is that they don't seem to trust the F.B.I. any more," Calahan said in a hurt tone.

"They never did," Bill said dryly. "That's one of the troubles with our government. On some things the best way to work is in secrecy. If you don't get results they think you're incompetent, and if you get them by plodding along and keeping things quiet they start suspecting you're plotting to overthrow the Government." He scowled. "God knows what'll happen when they descend on Pete and Sprague. Maybe Pete will find out his wife was an F.B.I. girl who was assigned to trap him and fell in love with him instead."

"I doubt it," Carter said. "And your suggestion to the Committee that they hire Pete and Sprague to run the place was damn good. They probably know more about such things than anyone else in the world."

Bill grinned. "It would be a good thing. Sometimes I think maybe Sprague really could isolate the soul if he had anything to go on. This would be his big opportunity. But I don't know. The Committee is pretty much sold on Ashbrook. They think he's the only one who's shown any common sense so far. Also he has the kind of background they respect. A university professor, and right on the subject. Psychology, the science of the mind. If he gets the job he can write his own ticket, hire his own little clique of fellow psychologists . . ."

"Maybe we could do something," Carter said thoughtfully. "My orders from the Committee are to assign some of my men to tracking down any clues that can be uncovered relating to the leaving of those babies on their respective doorsteps. I'm going to put you two to work on that together. But maybe we could kill two birds with one stone.

"If we could get Ashbrook and Pete and Sprague together before this starts moving, then whatever happened they would probably wind up in joint charge of the Mental-physics Foundation. Bill, didn't Doris say something about people who contribute to Sprague's work? Call her up. Get the names of several of those people. Especially those who live in or close to Seattle. Pick one out and see what he's like. If it looks risky we could assign someone to impersonate him while we

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got Ashbrook acquainted enough with Sprague's work to make him want to investigate." He turned to the desk, picking up the phone. "Get me the Flagstaff office," he said. Then, to Bill, "The Flagstaff office can call the number and if Doris answers the phone you can be connected through their local office board so no one can trace the call."

Five minutes later Bill was talking to Doris, explaining no more than he thought necessary.

"The man you want is ready made," she said. "He lives in Seattle. He's said several times Sprague ought to get university cooperation on his work. He'd jump at the chance to do what you want. Just a minute while I look him up in the files." A moment later she was back on the phone. "Alfred P. Luntz, 4307 Brooklyn Avenue in Seattle. He was up here once. About forty, owns a laundry. Quite successful."

* * *

"THIS is the F.B.I. man who talked to me before, dear," Mrs. Arbright said to her husband.

"Yes?" George Arbright snapped, his eyes going cold.

"Yes," Calahan said. "My name's Calahan, and this is my partner Nichols."

"What do you want this time?" Arbright said.

"Now look, Mr. Arbright," Calahan said soothingly. "I know you don't like any of this. But the best thing you can do is have us on your side. You'll find that we go out of our way to be nice to people. We've even been known to buck other governmental departments for those who cooperate with us."

"Guess you're right," Arbright said, sighing deeply. "But I don't like any of this. I keep thinking the outcome will be that we will lose our boy."

"We're working to get to the bottom of the mystery of why he and those hundreds of others were left on doorsteps," Nichols spoke up. "That's our greatest hope of clearing things up so Arthur and the others can stay home and live normal lives. We need your help."

"All right, I'll help," Arbright said.

"First of all, what line of work are you in?" Calahan asked.

"What's that got to do with it —oh all right, I'm an insurance man."

"Then you must know quite a few people," Calahan mused. "Know a laundry owner by the name of Alfred Luntz?"

"I have a speaking acquaintance with him. We handle some of his insurance."

"Good," Calahan said. "I wonder if you would play along with us on something. I'm going way out on a limb to tell you this. We would like you to throw some kind of party and make sure that Alfred Luntz

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and George Ashbrook are invited, and see that they get to meet each other and talk to each other. That's all you have to do."

Arbright looked at his wife. She frowned a moment.

"How soon do you want this party?" she asked.

"As soon as possible," Calahan said. "Today is Wednesday. Could you make it tomorrow night? If they can both come, that is."

"We'll foot the bill," Nichols said. "Hire servants if you like."

Mrs. Arbright went to the phone. After looking up a number she dialed rapidly. "Hello?" she said. "This is Mrs. Arbright. Is this Mrs. Luntz talking? Good. My husband and yours are quite good friends. George has often told me he likes Alfred so well he would like for us to get together some time, but I kept putting it off. You know how it is." She laughed comfortably. "He has? I'd hoped he might have mentioned George some time. It would have been embarrassing if you'd never heard of me. What I called about was that I'm having a little get-together tomorrow night. That is, tomorrow night is tentative so far. Could you and your husband come? We'd love to have you . . . Oh you can? Wonderful. I'll look forward to seeing you then. About eight o'clock."

The conversation went on another five minutes, but Calahan turned to Mr. Arbright and said in a low voice, "Another thing. Can you recall anything about when you and your wife found Arthur on your doorstep?"

Arbright smiled. "I'll never forget a single detail. Helen had been home from the hospital only two weeks after the auto accident. She had learned that she could never have any children, and it preyed on her mind quite a bit. I discovered the basket with the baby in it on the front porch as I was leaving for the office, and without touching it I called her. You should have seen the change that came over her." He chuckled in recollection. "I was for reporting the child, but she said flatly that if I did and we couldn't keep Arthur she would leave me. The upshot of it was that I immediately found this house and we moved away from our old one. Made a couple of thousand on the switch too, and put it in the bank for Arthur's college education when he grows up."

Calahan nodded. "Now think carefully. Did you notice anything out of the ordinary that morning? Any sounds before you found the baby, maybe while you still lay in bed half asleep?"

"No . . ."

"Had it been raining? Were there any footprints on the porch or anything?"

"There'd been a heavy dew, I think," Arbright said. "It seems to me I noticed a couple of places

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where the dew had been flattened out, like perhaps a large dog . . ."

"No human footprints."

"No."

"Anything else unusual that morning?" Calahan persisted.

"Nothing at all," Arbright said.

"What about the milk?" Mrs. Arbright said. She had finished her phone conversation unnoticed.

"Oh yes, the milk," Arbright said. "I'd forgotten that. We always got one quart of milk. That morning there were four. I was going to bawl the driver out, but after we found the baby we forgot all about it."

"Wasn't that unusual?" Calahan asked. "Had he ever done that before?"

"No."

"Can you remember what company you got your milk from?"

* * *

CALAHAN attended the party without Bill. They decided it was better for Bill not to meet Ashbrook or Luntz as an F.B.I. man, since he might soon be playing the part of Doris's drinking brother around Ashbrook, if things worked out right.

"No one's here yet, Calahan," Arbright greeted him, "and Helen mislaid her face or something."

"Just so she doesn't call on me to find it for her," Calahan said, relaxing in a large chair.

"Did you locate the milkman?" Arbright asked. "That sort of thing interests me. I've read quite a few mystery stories. I've been picturing all day what you'd find. The milkman recalling that particular morning and remembering that there'd been a note telling him to leave four quarts instead of one. Then he remembers that that was the last day they wore their old uniform, and he still had the uniform he was wearing that morning, in a trunk up in the attic. He brings it down, and sure enough the note is in there. You take it down to a laboratory and find the fingerprints of Lefty Feep, and now you have the man behind it all safely locked up."

Calahan grinned. "You've been reading too many stories. The milkman produced the note telling him to leave four quarts of milk, all right, but that was his undoing. We arrested him. He's the man behind the whole thing. He's confessed. He's the father of all those children, and the reason they have such unusual powers is because they've been raised on Harmony Milk and Milk Products. You see, the mothers were all on his old route, and when the babies came he simply got rid of them by distributing them on his new route."

There was a shocked expression in Arbright's eyes for an instant, then both men were laughing.

"What'd you really find out?" Arbright asked.

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"The milkman that particular morning was the relief man. He made several mistakes. There's still a chance there was a note left for him, if he can remember it after eight years. However, the Social Security records, obtained after a quick Presidential order, show that he has worked in five different cities since then. When last heard from he received a full twenty-six weeks of unemployment checks from an address on a rural route in California. The F.B.I. office nearest there is sending a man out to see if he still lives there. That took all day." He shrugged his shoulders. "We won't find anything significant. The main reason we would like to locate him is that he might have noticed something. Maybe even the person who left the baby on your doorstep. By the way, did you by any chance keep the basket and blankets he came in?"

Arbright shook his head. "Helen got rid of them. Thought if they were left around and the mother of the baby wanted it back she could prove it was hers by describing the basket and blankets."

Calahan nodded. "There was a chance she would have kept them for their memories. But undoubtedly some of the women will have on the others. But we don't expect anything startling from them. Department store stuff, no doubt."

"Brand new," Arbright said. "There was a diamond shaped label stuck on the side of the basket. As I remember, I had the impression the basket and blankets had probably been purchased the day before."

"The basket was the kind they sell at Fields," Mrs. Arbright said from the doorway. "The blankets were Comfortevers. I gathered the woman who deserted Arthur was well off, because she could have chosen just as good blankets at half the price."

Calahan took out a notebook and jotted down the information. While he was doing it the doorbell rang.

"By the way," Calahan said quickly, "where's Arthur?"

"In his room," Mrs. Arbright said. "Or maybe next door. He has a private entrance to his room so he can come and go."

* * *

CALAHAN smiled to himself in satisfaction as he was introduced to Alfred Luntz. The man was an aggressive type. The kind that gets positive ideas and sticks to them. And when Ashbrook arrived and was introduced around, Calahan's feeling was one of supreme contentment when he saw the light that sprang into Luntz's eyes when he learned Ashbrook was a psychology professor at the University. The rest could take care of itself. It was quite evident Luntz would get Ashbrook up to meet Sprague if he had

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to kidnap him to accomplish it.

So he sat back and smoked, and let things take their own course. And after a graceful length of time he slipped away. Bill was waiting at the hotel.

"Did it work?" he asked.

"Like a charm," Calahan said. "When I left even the Arbrights were getting interested in the ex-priest and his research. Could be they'll even take Arthur down there. Any word from the checkup in California?"

"That's why I've been waiting for you," Bill said. "I would have called you at Arbright's, but I didn't want to bother you while you were busy. Holmes went out there and found that Lloyd Granger the milkman died a year and a half ago. He got to talking with Granger's widow and she came up with the most fantastic story."

"Yeah?" Calahan said. "Let's go down to the bar. I'll hear it over a Scotch and soda."

Ten minutes later in a booth near the jukebox Bill continued.

"She didn't remember even what year all this happened," he said. "She didn't think it could have been eight years ago. She was more inclined to think it had been in Detroit six years ago. But here's the story as Holmes told it over the phone.

"Lloyd Granger came home from his milk route one morning with more than one drink in him. He wasn't a drinking man. He did some more drinking. Finally he told his wife about it. He told her that while he was on his route about four-thirty in the morning a woman with a basket came walking along the sidewalk and stopped by his milk truck until he came back from the house he was leaving milk at. She asked him if he knew of any women on his route who couldn't have children. The woman was wearing some kind of long cloak that made him think she might be with something like the Salvation Army, so he told her about some woman on the route that was a customer, who had been in an auto accident and was hurt internally so she could never have children. She asked which house they lived in and he told her. Then the woman thanked him and left. He watched her cut down an alley, then went on delivering milk; but he kept thinking about her and wondering what was in that basket. The more he thought about it the more sure he was that it had contained a baby. Finally he decided to take a run over to this house just to see if it had been a baby and she had left it on their porch. He got there in time to see the woman and her husband taking the basket into the house, so he started up the walk with the intention of telling them about this woman.

"Then the woman who had talked to him earlier that morning step-

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ped out of the bushes right in his path and told him to go about his business and forget all about it. He told her that was a pretty awful thing, abandoning her baby, and he was going to take her down to the police station and get to the bottom of things. He made a grab for her. She leaped back, but he had a grip on her cloak. It came off in his hands, and then he just stood there, stunned, while she beat at him. She wasn't wearing anything under the cloak and he swore that she had giant wings and that her feet were like the claws of some huge bird.

"She beat him to the sidewalk and dug her claws into him in such a way that she could have picked him up like an eagle would pick up a rabbit. Then she made him promise he would never say anything about what he had seen, threatening to fly up in the air with him and drop him on the pavement if he didn't. So he promised. Then she wadded her cloak up and held it under her arm, and took a few running steps with her wings flapping, and took off.

"Lloyd Granger's wife never really believed him, because he absolutely refused to go to the police or even tell the people on whose doorstep the baby had been left. He kept saying it was none of his business.

"But there was something else Mrs. Granger claims to have seen with her own eyes. A few days after that happened she noticed that her husband had four parallel scars running diagonally down across his chest. They weren't fresh scars, but looked like they would if he had been injured years before. She asked him about them. He insisted he had had them since he was a kid when he was attacked by a bear. But she would swear on a stack of Bibles that his chest hadn't had a scar of any kind before that time he came home drunk."

"Any more?" Calahan asked.

"That's all," Bill said. "Should we take a run down and talk with her?"

"Holmes is handing in a report?" Calahan asked. "Then we won't need to waste our time. The man is dead. The woman's testimony is worse than valueless. And even if it weren't, even if everything you've said were actual fact, where would it get us? What we're after is someone we can lay our hands on, who can say, 'Yes, I was part of the gang that left those eight hundred babies. It was all engineered by so-and-so for such-and-such a purpose.' Carter won't be satisfied with less. Neither will the Committee. And I don't think we're going to find anything we can sink our teeth into on any of this."

"Neither do I, frankly," Bill said. "The trail is too old and too cold. But I can't help thinking . . . there's a lot of things about that story that sound similar to Ashbrook's story

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of Arthur killing Fletcher by thought after making him grow a foot in height by thought power alone. Take those scars . . . Suppose this strange woman made deep scratches, then healed them up in a hurry so they wouldn't be evidence in case the milkman told the police?"

"Sure sure," Calahan derided, "and her shape could have been just an illusion, including her flying away. Where'd she fly to? Some other planet? And why doesn't Arthur have wings if she's his mother? Forget it. We've got to call on the Condons and the Bakers in the morning and see what we can uncover concerning their two kids Joan and Lin."

* * *

ASHBROOK glanced distastefully at the bleak scenery outside the car and thought of the restful lawns and bushes and gardens of the University of Washington campus.

"Wonderful country, this," Luntz said enthusiastically. "One of these days when I retire I'm going to buy up a few thousand acres of it and settle down. There's Father Sprague's retreat up ahead."

Ashbrook looked in the direction Luntz had pointed and soon spied the squat concrete buildings. Seconds later Luntz braked almost to a stop and turned onto a one lane road that ran precariously along the side of the steep slope, with the car threatening to go plunging off down the hill at every lurch.

Then, miraculously, they were safe in a sort of courtyard and a woman was coming from the house to the car, waving a cheery greeting. A little later two men appeared from another building. Ashbrook's respect for them went up when he detected signs that they didn't like the idea of meeting him any more than he did meeting them. Luntz's loud voice was an irritating background that everyone had to put up with. He was a heavy contributor to this work here, and to scholarships at the university as well.

He was pleasantly surprised when spiritual mediums weren't brought out. After dinner the conversation dealt with small talk. He was again pleasantly surprised when bedtime came and no one had solemnly announced that a seance would now be held. Luntz hadn't said anything like that would be forthcoming, but Ashbrook had built up such a picture from the man's enthusiastic descriptions of the *work*, as he called it. He went to sleep deciding that he rather liked Mr. and Mrs. Glass and Father Sprague, the ex-priest.

In the morning after breakfast he was politely invited to inspect one of the laboratories. And when he stepped inside the door of the laboratory he stared for a moment, then turned to the two men who

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vere his hosts with wonder on his ace.

"Why," he said, "this is a labora-ory!"

His meaning was clear to the two nen, who laughed.

"We've come a long way in wenty-eight years," Sprague said. Some of the things we can do here vill surprise you. But so far as the earch we started out on is con-erned we haven't reached even a eginning."

"You mean isolation of the hu-nan soul?"

"In a way," Pete said. "But per-aps the best way for you to get cquainted with some of the things ve've done is to take you on a onducted tour. Nothing harmful. Ve don't do anything to you that ve haven't done to ourselves and thers hundreds of times."

"Why not?" Ashbrook said. What's first?"

Sprague went over to a stiff back hair surrounded by equipment. Sit down here, Dr. Ashbrook," he aid.

When Ashbrook complied, he noved a cone shaped instrument round so that its cone could be oved around his head at various ngles.

"This is an induction machine," e explained. "You've no doubt read f experiments where they remove art of the bone covering of the rain and touch the cortex with fine ires with very mild electric currents in them? This does much the same thing without surgery. We'll probe your visual centers first."

Suddenly the campus of the university stretched out in front of Ashbrook. The lab was still there, but less real in appearance than the campus. Other scenes appeared, vivid and detailed. Then they vanished, leaving only the lab.

"Now we'll try voices," Sprague said.

Ashbrook listened while the room seemed filled with disembodied voices. Some of them he recognized, and with some he even remembered the circumstances under which he had originally heard them. There were a few phrases in the voice of the dead Fletcher that seemed to come from a few feet to the right of him. He recalled the evening when Fletcher had been sitting just that distance away and spoken them.

The voices stopped.

"We could switch to pain centers," Sprague said. "If you ever had a toothache you could get it all over again. Any pain you've actually experienced and have in your memory. We have to handle this machine with extreme care though. With the cone in the wrong spots we could make you do damage to yourself."

"Why haven't you shown this machine to the world?" Ashbrook demanded as he stood up.

"We might sometime," Sprague

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said indifferently. "When we get through with it, that is."

* * *

"SEND him in," Herbert Carter said. He dropped the phone on its cradle and looked expectantly toward the door which shortly opened. Ashbrook entered.

The two shook hands with the warmth of old friends this time. Carter, studying Ashbrook with the knowledge that the man had just been up to meet Sprague and Pete and see something of their research, interpreted the air of suppressed excitement of the psychologist as a good sign.

"What brings you to Washington?" he asked.

"I've found them," Ashbrook said.

"Found who?" Carter said, turning his back and going around his desk to his chair.

"The only men in the world who could conceivably have created those children," Ashbrook announced.

"Huh?" Carter exploded. He had thought he could never be surprised by anything. He was, and in the split second after the shock of surprise a thousand things clicked together, bringing a sinking feeling of dismay.

He listened, while Ashbrook swiftly reported his visit to the mountain laboratory. The descriptions of the various machines were something new. He realized that Bill's playing of the drinking brother had had its defects. Pete and Sprague had never seen fit to take him behind the scenes and show him what they were actually doing.

On the surface, as Ashbrook unfolded his tale, Carter could see how damning it all appeared. But he knew Doris. He was sure such a vast operation as changing newborn babies could not have been done without her knowledge. Especially since she was a loved and trusted member of the group. And even if she had believed in the plan she would have let him know, if for no other reason than to ensure against surprise.

While he was listening to Ashbrook he was trying frantically to decide what to do, what line to take on this. But there was only one line he could take.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Dr. Ashbrook," he said with no sign of his internal upset. "We know all about Peter Glass and Father Sprague the ex-priest. And very little of what you have said about their laboratory is unknown to me. We've been in constant touch with them during the past twenty-eight years that they've been engaged on their research. I can assure you that never in any of that time has there been any possibility of what you have charged."

"In constant touch?" Ashbrook said. "How constant? I tell you this

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thing is subtle. Their main organization wouldn't even need to be up there on that mountain. From what I've seen I would say that if *I* were in back of it, I could have done everything right under your nose without exciting suspicion."

Carter shook his head. He saw he was going to have a job averting suspicion from Pete and Sprague, but he would have to do it.

"I'm going to tell you something in strict confidence," he said. "I want your word that you won't repeat it to anyone under any circumstances whatever. Do I have it?"

"Ah—all right," Ashbrook said.

"We know Father Sprague's entire background. We also know Peter Glass's entire background. I can most solemnly assure you they had nothing to do with those children and don't even know of their existance."

Ashbrook shook his head, only partly impressed. "I'm a psychologist," he said. "There have been cases of seemingly upright people engaging in a career of crime, even resorting to murder, while their dearest friends had no slightest inkling of it. Do you know what you've done? You've convinced me that you hold those two men and that woman so above suspicion that you refuse to consider them as possible suspects, even though I, an expert, assure you that there is no one else on the face of the earth who could have brought those children into existence."

"Nonsense!" Carter said irritably.

"It's not nonsense," Ashbrook said. He stared at Carter angrily. Then suddenly the anger left his eyes. He relaxed visibly. A contrite smile quirked his lips. "Or maybe it is. I was forgetting that in your way you are an expert too. You have to be, to be the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation." He chuckled. "I can even understand your anger. I've felt the same thing toward many an upstart student who went off on some wild theory and tried to force it down my throat." He became mildly serious again. "But do this, will you? Investigate them again in the light of what I'm inclined to think. If they're what you think them, they will stand it. If not, we've gotten to the roots of the whole thing. If they created those children I would like to know why. I keep thinking of poor Arthur with his guilt complex at having unwittingly killed his dearest friend."

"Okay, it's a deal," Carter said. "And I'll see that you receive a report on what we find out. Meanwhile I have your word that none of this will be repeated?"

"I assure you I'm not an irresponsible tale spreader," Ashbrook said, standing up.

Carter rose and shook hands with him. After he had gone he went back to his desk and slowly went through the operations of lighting a fresh cigar. It was half smoked before he

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reached for the phone. "Send Hanson in," he said.

And when Hanson came in he gave terse instructions.

"I want a more thorough investigation than any you've ever made before of anyone. You'll have to enter unlawfully and search records. You'll have to trace things back with especial concentration on the years 1968 and 69. I want to know everything there is to know—about a man named George Ashbrook."

"He the guy who just left here?" Hanson asked.

"Yes."

HE made his next move the moment Hanson had left. He gave the telephone operator instructions to get Bill Nichols on the wire as soon as she could locate him. It was two hours before the phone rang and Bill's voice sounded.

"Hi, Herb," he said. "We're getting a few results, but nothing worth a damn. We even have the blankets and the basket that Joan Condon came in, but they're valueless as clues. Bought in any one of dozens of stores—"

"Calahan can handle that now," Carter cut in. "You're going on an assignment I don't like to give you, but have to. Fly to Washington. I'll be in my apartment when you arrive. Come straight there. Understand?"

"Right," Bill said.

Whatever it was, it was something his chief didn't want any records of. He didn't waste time. He told Calahan about it and caught the next plane, arriving in Washington six hours later.

Carter came straight to the point, outlining his meeting with Ashbrook with swift, bitter sentences.

"I hope you see what we're into," he concluded. "In a few days Major Smith and his Committee are going to call Ashbrook here and ask him to head the Mentalphysics Foundation. Work has already started on the buildings in northern Utah. When Ashbrook's top dog he's going to make trouble."

"What do you want me to do, Herb?" Bill asked.

"The details are up to you. You could arrive at your 'sister's' with the calm announcement that you had lost your job and intended staying there indefinitely. Or you could 'get a job' in Flagstaff and visit them nearly every day. I want you to be there for two reasons. One, there's just a remote chance that Ashbrook's right. He's a plenty smart cookie. Two, if he's wrong, and we know he is, then Doris and Pete have to be protected. If for no other reason, then to keep us from being involved. A Congressional investigation would almost certainly bring out that Pete is really Peter Hart, and Doris was a former F.B.I. girl. After twenty-eight years that might not destroy their marriage, but I don't want to take the chance. And

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what it would do toward adding weight to Ashbrook's suspicions! Even the Department would be under suspicion."

"Suspicion?" Bill said. "If they just uncovered the facts as we know them you and I and a lot of others would go to jail. If they made a case against Pete and Sprague about those kids we could be tried for plotting to overthrow the government."

"I guess that's a pretty accurate estimate," Carter said grimly.

Bill stood up and walked aimlessly about the room, a deep frown on his face. He turned to Carter.

"I'd like a little better idea of what I'm supposed to do. I know now that Pete and Sprague have gone much farther in their research than we guessed. They haven't bothered to tell me much about it, considering me just the 'drinking brother-in-law'. I'm hamstrung by the fact that under no circumstances must Pete ever find out I'm what I am. How far can I go? Can I go with them into hiding from the law, for example? And what do I do if I find out they really did create those kids?"

"It's a ticklish situation," Carter said. "I'll protect you, and them. Of course. If we get orders to move in I'll tip you off and delay things as long as possible. I'd suggest you talk it over with Doris. That's all I can say."

* * *

"THANKS for the ride, mister," Bill said, slamming the door as his benefactor started up again. He watched the sedan round the next turn, then started walking. The sun was hot and the road hard and dry underfoot. Twice during the four mile walk he stepped gingerly wide of coiled rattlesnakes that glared at him with evil eyes.

After an hour and a half he reached the end of the road and turned into the yard. He whistled loudly, looking expectantly toward the kitchen door in anticipation of Doris's appearance. Everything remained motionless and silent.

He rattled the kitchen door. It was locked.

"Must have gone into town," he muttered. Then in a loud shout, "Anybody here?"

There was no response.

He went to the nearest building. A heavy padlock was on the door. He went to a window and peered inside. There were empty benches. Against one wall was a glistening motor-generator unit. He squinted, adjusting his eyes to the interior gloom. There were exposed wires at the side of the unit. It had been disconnected.

Bill's lips puckered into a silent, dismayed whistle. He stared another few seconds, then abruptly turned and went to the kitchen door again.

A brief inspection proved that the lock couldn't be opened by anything

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he had. He used his shoulder gently until he heard the splintering of wood. When the door was open he saw he could repair the damage with a little glue and some small nails.

The furniture was still where it should be. So was the telephone. He picked it up, and sighed with relief when he heard the dial tone.

He dropped the phone and got a drink of water, then explored the pantry. It was well stocked. He started preparing himself some lunch.

A half hour later he sat back and lit a cigaret and started reviewing the situation. Sprague, Pete, and Doris had fled. Why? Was it because of Ashbrook's visit? Had the psychology teacher openly accused them of being responsible for the children? That was hardly likely. Ashbrook would have been more likely to keep his suspicions to himself. But it could be checked by a few tactful questions put to Alfred Luntz.

The main thing was, where could they have gone to? They had obviously taken their scientific equipment with them. Probably by truck. Still, trucks could go unnoticed since there were so many of them along the highway.

But Doris—had she gone along with them without any attempt to let Carter know where they were going? She might have thought that under the circumstances that would be best. And if it came to a showdown her loyalty would be with Sprague and Pete, not with the F.B.I.

Still, she might have anticipated that he would show up shortly, and leave a note somewhere that would tell him where they had gone. Or she might have dropped him or Carter a letter telling them.

He spent a fruitless half hour searching the house. There was not so much as a scrap of paper with writing on it. There were clothes with empty pockets. There were filing cabinets. Empty. And out in the yard was an incinerator filled with paper ashes that had been well poked into fine powder—and still hot underneath.

Finally Bill went to the phone again and called the Flagstaff office and asked them to get Carter through their switchboard.

"Hello, Herb?" Bill said when he heard the familiar voice. "I'm here, but they've flown the coop."

He waited for his chief's response but it didn't come. Finally he realized that the line was dead.

He ran outside and around the house until he saw where the wires went up to a pole. He followed the poles down the hill with his eyes, until, far below, he saw a man.

There was a car not far from the man. It was a telephone company service truck.

"So they gave orders for their phone to be disconnected," he said. "Damn."

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He took a quick step on the impulse to run down the hill, remembered the rattlesnakes and brought up short. There was a rueful smile on his lips. "I *would* add that cute touch of arriving as a hitch-hiker," he muttered.

* * *

CARTER heard Bill say, "I'm here but they've flo—" Fifteen minutes later he learned from the Flagstaff F.B.I. office that the local telephone company had had orders to disconnect the phone. The orders had come by mail that very morning. The whole picture became clear. Pete and Sprague had decided to slip away while the going was good.

"It's good in one way," he decided. "If the heat really goes on and they're found they can always claim they didn't know it, and their move was the normal one of people who have no obligation to inform anyone they have moved."

He wondered idly where they could have gone. Then he shrugged his shoulders. It was really better this way. At least for the present.

It was evening in Washington when Bill called him at his apartment and confirmed what he already knew.

"You might as well go back to Seattle and join Calahan," he said. "Unless we hear from Doris we'll let that angle ride."

"What about Ashbrook?" Bill asked. "Won't he be wanting a report on Sprague and Pete very shortly?"

Carter said, "Damn Ashbrook. I'm going to take the official stand that I don't consider them under suspicion, and that I sent an investigator up there and found they had moved. Meanwhile I'll tell the Flagstaff office to check for change of address at the post office, etcetera. Let them make something out of it if they want to."

After he had talked to Bill he tried to relax with a book. Finally he gave it up and went to bed.

He had tossed in the throes of insomnia for an hour when his phone rang once more. It was a long distance call from Seattle, which, he decided while he waited for it to get through, must be from Calahan, since no one else there would know his number.

"Hello. Herb?" Calahan's voice finally came. "Bugs. I called to tell you that Arthur Arbright has vanished."

"Oh, fine," Carter said bitterly. "That's all we need. I suppose someone saw him get into a mysterious truck which sped away."

"How did you know?" Calahan said in mild surprise. "That's exactly what happened. The truck had an Arizona license on it, too."

"Hold on a minute," Carter said. He sat and stared into space. Finally he spoke into the phone. "Calahan."

"Yeah?"

"In the morning have the local of-

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fice interview this Alfred Luntz where you can overhear everything. Have them ask him all about his trip with Ashbrook down there. Find out his frank impressions of Ashbrook. Find out what went on down there and especially what he said himself. This is speculation."

* * *

CALAHAN entered the laundry building and asked for Mr. Luntz. He had decided to do the thing his own way. Luntz had met him at the Arbrights and would probably remember it and consider this just a social call. He smiled to himself. He probably wouldn't have to ask a single question.

Luntz did remember him. He came out of his office and personally escorted him back, giving him all the deference he would have given a monarch.

"Of course I remember you, Mr. Calahan," he was saying. "You're the very good friend of the Arbrights. Come right in."

"I was in the neighborhood," Calahan said.

"By all means," Luntz said. "By all means. Drop in whenever you are near." They were in his private office now. He closed the door and dragged a chair over beside his ornate desk for his guest. "You remember the other guest, Dr. Ashbrook of the University? He and I just returned from a delightful trip to Arizona where another good friend of mine lives". As a preface to his next remark he spread his hands in an all-encompassing gesture. "You might not believe it to look at all this, but I'm deeply interested in science."

"Yes?" Calahan said.

"Science," Luntz said. He frowned at Calahan. "Have you seen the Arbright boy?"

"Today?" Calahan asked, startled by the suddenness of the question.

"No no. I mean, have you met him? Quite a remarkable child, don't you think? He's even more remarkable than you might think. Dr. Ashbrook was telling me about him. That boy has mental gifts. Believe me he has. Dr. Ashbrook has been studying them for some time. And these friends of mine in Arizona have been engaged in research on such things for a good many years. I don't do any serious research myself, you understand. I'm what they call a catalyst. I bring people together and let them combine their work, like a catalyst in chemistry, if you know anything about such things."

"A little," Calahan said cautiously. But he saw that Luntz was wound up and might go on for hours without handing out anything pertinent. He decided to lead the conversation a little. "Do these friends of yours in Arizona know about Arthur?"

"I don't think they did," Luntz said, "but they do now. If Dr. Ash-

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brook didn't tell them, at least I told Mrs. Glass, the wife of one of my friends. She and I discussed Arthur at great length while her husband and Father Sprague, this other friend, (he isn't a priest any more, by the way), were out in the lab. She was especially interested in what Dr. Ashbrook had told me on the way down about Arthur's ability to affect inanimate nature by pure thought."

"Well," Calahan said brightly, "maybe these scientist friends of yours might come up and see Arthur then."

"Mrs. Glass said she thought her husband might, and so I gave her their address and told her I would get in touch with my friend Mr. Arbright and warn him."

Calahan looked at his watch. "Oh oh," he said. "I'm afraid I'll have to be going. Have an appointment. How would you like to have lunch with me sometime? I just don't know when it would be. I'm probably going to be out of town for a while. I could call you. . . "

"Fine," Luntz said with almost pathetic eagerness. "Just give me a ring." He escorted him all the way out to his car and stood on the curb looking wistful as Calahan drove off.

He felt sorry for the laundry owner all the way down to the office, then forgot him. Bill Nichols was there. And he had heard all about the disappearance of Arthur Arbright.

* * *

"THINGS are getting worse and worse," Bill said gloomily when they were alone. "I'm beginning to expect a grand bust at any minute; with you and me and the chief behind bars."

"I'm almost looking forward to it", Calahan said. "Just think. Weeks of absolute rest before the trial. I haven't had a real vacation in years."

"Maybe you've got something there," Bill smiled. "I'm thinking of Doris. I've always had a soft spot for her."

"She wouldn't condone kidnapping," Calahan said sharply.

"You know, I'm not so sure," Bill said. "We've been sort of losing sight of the forest on account of the trees."

"Meaning what?"

"I've been doing some serious thinking," Bill said slowly. "This Luntz fellow, you say, told her all about Arthur. Possibly Ashbrook told Pete and Sprague about him too, and all those other children. And here's something else. Ashbrook went away from there full of suspicions. He may have given those suspicions away. Doris is still an F.B.I. girl, no matter what. Put yourself in her place. Their place. Here's a guy who is about to accuse them of having brought those children into existence. What would be the best way to defend yourself? Wait and be arrested?"

"I see," Calahan said. "And if I

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had machines that could conceivably change a normal youngster into a superman, and hadn't done so myself, I would probably decide to take the bull by the horns and solve the mystery myself."

"That's what I think," Bill said. "It would be opening yourself to a charge of kidnapping maybe, but in the long run it might be the only thing that would pay off."

"So where would they go?" Calahan asked.

"Your guess is as good as mine," Bill shrugged. "I don't think I particularly want to know. As it is, the chief's in a bad spot if Ashbrook decides to tell the Committee about his interview with him."

"I wonder how soon it will be before the big putsch comes?" Calahan mused. "God . . . Eight hundred odd kids taken from their homes by Government decree, classed as enemy aliens during a time when we supposedly have no enemies, and thrown into a concentration camp surrounded by concrete walls ten feet thick like an atom pile."

Bill grinned. "The army and those Congressmen have a lot of respect for strange energies. They think in symbols, and *Mentalphysics* is a humdinger of a symbol if there ever was one. Also it's a new toy for them to play with. With the United Nations reigning Supreme all they have to watch out for is armies that march across boundaries they shouldn't. So this is a swell toy for their dramatic little minds."

"I wonder what is in back of it," Calahan said. "I wonder if anyone will ever find out. It's possible no one ever will, you know. Those kids could grow up with their powers fully developed and actually take over the entire world without anything ever developing that would reveal who brought them here in the first place."

"That's true," Bill said. "They're eight years old now. It will probably be at least twelve years before they reach full development of their abilities, even under ideal conditions. From there on it might take them ten, twenty years to mature anything they decide on in the way of a life program. By that time their creators could be dead and undiscoverable. The chief and us will be old men, retired or dead. And I don't think anything's going to come of all this investigation of the past. Whoever left them on doorsteps is never going to come out and admit it at this late date."

"I don't expect anything from that line of investigation either," Calahan said, "but there's another line that I think may pay off."

"What's that?" Bill asked.

"A criminal always returns to the scene of his crime," Calahan pronounced solemnly, "and the scene of the crime will soon be localized behind concrete walls ten feet thick, with guards at every entrance. Someone within those walls, when it gets

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going, will know all about it right from the beginning. My own guess is that the genius, sane or mad, who created those kids, will be there."

Bill stared at him in surprise, digesting that. Then he grinned. "What if he isn't human?"

"Oh he's human all right," Calahan said. "In spite of that story the milkman's wife told. And when the gates clang shut on the Mentalphysics Foundation I want to go in there and take a good look at every one of the people who work there, including the sveedish yanitor. And then start narrowing down suspects."

* * *

CARTER parked his car near the west front of the Pentagon Building and locked it. Major Smith had called his office and told the girl to inform him he was wanted at once. Hadn't even inquired if he was there.

It rankled. Under ordinary circumstances he would have ignored the request. As it was, his footsteps were sharp rapid notes on the marble floor of the hall as he hurried toward Smith's office.

The girl secretary recognized him and motioned him toward Smith's private office. He knocked once, turned the knob, and went in. Ashbrook was sitting there.

"Oh oh," he thought.

"Come in, Carter," Major Smith said. "You've met Dr. Ashbrook of course. It was you who brought him to our attention in the first place."

"Of course," Carter said. "Hello doctor." They shook hands.

"We've told Dr. Ashbrook of the decision of the Committee to make him nominal head of the Mentalphysics Foundation," Smith said. "That's why he's here. The University of Washington very graciously released him from his duties there so he could take on his new duties at once. And already he has made valuable suggestions."

"I'm sure he has," Carter said.

"Yes," Major Smith said. "I see now that we should have had him here at once before we settled on any plans. He has advanced the suggestion that the Foundation be made large enough so that the adopted parents of the children can live there and carry on a normal home life for them. Some of them can be absorbed into the Foundation activity such as building maintainance. Small industries could be incorporated that would absorb the rest."

"That is certainly a good suggestion," Carter said. "It will also take the sting out of uprooting those children. I was wondering what public reaction would be if eight hundred or so children were willy nilly snatched from their homes."

"Correct," Major Smith said. His lips compressed into a straight line for a moment. Carter saw it coming. "What has your investigation disclosed as to the expriest Sprague and

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his partner?"

"Nothing," Carter said apologetically. "I immediately sent an investigator out there from our office here. He reports their place had been recently vacated. In fact, while he was there the Flagstaff Telephone Company came along and disconnected the phone on orders they had just received by mail."

"Don't you think that suspicious?" the Major asked, while Ashbrook remained passive.

"Not under the circumstances," Carter said. "So far as I know they had no reason to think they might receive a call from my department. If it was suspicious, then everyone who moves without informing the F.B.I. is behaving suspiciously." He smiled. They didn't.

"I believe," Major Smith said, "that your Seattle office has informed you that a truck bearing an Arizona license was seen picking up the boy, Arthur Arbright, who has been kidnapped . . ."

"I think that's correct," Carter admitted. "They have orders to investigate that. There is some question as to whether he was kidnapped or not. No ransom note has been received yet."

Smith made a sound of impatience. "You see no connection between the disappearance of these people in Arizona and the kidnapping of Arthur Arbright in a truck with an Arizona license the following day?"

"I see a possible connection," Carter snapped. "I don't jump at conclusions. I don't call those people moving at just this time a disappearance."

"Are you acquainted with the work of this expriest Sprague?"

"Yes," Carter said, relaxing his face into a grin. "He believes people have souls. He's been spending the last twenty-eight years trying to find it. So far he hasn't succeeded."

"That's all he has been doing?" Major Smith asked softly. "Then why have *you* been interested in him, Mr. Carter?"

"Why . . ." He hesitated, looking from Smith to Ashbrook who stared at him without expression. He chuckled uncomfortably. "It goes back to 1950," he said, putting embarrassed frankness into his voice. "Communism, you know. We were investigating everyone who might even be remotely a tool of Russia. Sprague had been a Catholic priest in China for quite a few years. Suddenly for no apparent reason he returned to the United States, apparently fleeing the Chinese Red cleanup squads. At that time I wasn't in charge of the department, but was a little higher up than a legman. I investigated him and learned what he was trying to do. I soon established that he was above suspicion, and then I became interested in his work. Off duty I'm somewhat of a religious man, and even if I weren't I think I would be interested in finding out if I have a soul."

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For a fraction of an instant Major Smith's stern features relaxed into the shade of a smile. But Ashbrook continued to stare at him, and he could sense the wheels going round behind the psychologist's blank stare.

In a milder tone Major Smith said, "We want you to find Father Sprague and Mr. and Mrs. Glass. When you do we will subpoena them and bring them before the Committee for questioning. Of course, if they have kidnapped that child . . ."

Carter stood up. "We're doing all we can," he said. At the door he turned back and said, "By the way, how soon do you plan on collecting the children and sending them to the Foundation?"

Major Smith looked at Ashbrook before answering. He cleared his throat nervously and said, "In view of the kidnapping of Arthur Arbright we have already begun transporting them to an army camp where they will stay under armed protection until the Utah site is ready for them."

"And they weren't even going to tell me," Carter thought bitterly as he went out to his car.

Out on the street he turned his car toward his apartment house instead of the office. When he got there he started the call through to Hanson.

Finally the phone rang. It was Hanson.

"Hanson, chief," his voice came, practical. "I suppose you called to find out how I've been progressing on my assignment. I've been in my hotel room all day typing out a detailed report. It's to go in the mail in an hour."

"Hold it," Carter said, suddenly deciding to go to Seattle. "I'll be in Seattle this evening and read it there. Did you find anything important?"

* * *

HANSON opened the door in response to his knock. He went in. "Let's see that report on Ashbrook," he said.

Hanson hesitated the barest fraction of a second, then opened a drawer in the hotel desk and brought out some typewritten papers.

Carter read them rapidly. George Alvin Ashbrook had been born in Fargo, N.D. in 1930 which made him forty-eight years old. He had served in Korea and completed his college education at Northwestern University in Evanston Illinois in 1954. In 1956 after two years of teaching at Northwestern he had gone into private practice. In 1960 he had gone into the army as a psychiatrist in an advance hospital. After the war he had accepted a teaching position at the University of Washington, and for the past three years had been head of a department. He had never married.

From there the report showed

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Hanson's thoroughness. Ashbrook had a private room in his apartment that was kept locked. In it were an estimated two thousand books on occultism and allied lore including astrology. In a file that was kept locked were thousands of pages of typewritten manuscript under such titles as "The Influence of the Planets on the Human Psyche," and "The Origins of the Human Race in Legend From the Modern Viewpoint of Scientific Discovery." These manuscripts bore marks of revision and correction. And in one section of this private library were books printed from these manuscripts with the author given as K. E. Bealle, and the publisher as Educational Press, Los Angeles.

Carter smiled at the picture it gave of a respectable scientist and university professor dabbling in the subjects that officially he had to ignore as being crackpot.

When he finished the report he had a picture of a man who had apparently never done anything that could be construed as suspicious. During the time the children had been left on doorsteps he had been teaching classes at the university.

"NOW then," Carter said the next afternoon in his room. He was sitting on the edge of the bed with his perpetual cigar. Calahan was draped on the upholstered chair. Bill Nichols was in the hard chair with his legs on the desk precariously close to the tray of empty dishes from their lunch. "The first thing we should do is take stock," Carter said.

"It would be nice if Doris was with us," Bill said. "Remember the good old days when we four went at things together?"

"Maybe we will be eventually," Carter said. "In a way this may be the same case we were working on almost thirty years ago."

"Ralph Dexter?" Calahan said, showing interest.

Carter nodded. "We never did find him. We got his fingerprints. That's all. He was never found among the subversives we rounded up. He never worked in any war-plant or any other place where his fingerprints would be on file or we would have located him. I've often thought he might have been part of the diplomatic corps of Russia. Maybe even a high Soviet official. But when we got hold of the Kremlin files he wasn't in there either, though every other Soviet official's fingerprints were."

"He could be anyone," Calahan said. "And those may not have been his fingerprints. He could have, for example, invited some Bowery bum in for a drink or a meal. Some old guy who would almost certainly die in the next couple of months from rotgut."

"That's true," Carter admitted. "He could be anyone. He could even be Ashbrook." He puffed on

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his cigar and watched the smoke drift across the room. "Point number one is that all this mental stuff began in connection with him. I'm not trying to say he had anything to do with the mental angle, nor even that Pete's dream in which he murdered Ralph Dexter is even remotely connected with eight-year-old kids who can make birdseed grow up into birds that almost reach the point where they can fly away before they wither away. I'm just saying that since we don't understand any of it we must begin with item one. Ralph Dexter, the unknown."

"And," Bill said, "I suppose Nicholas Archer is item two?"

Carter shook his head. "I doubt if Archer ever really existed. I think he was just some nice old man who lived in the neighborhood where Peter Hart was raised when a boy. His name wasn't even Archer."

"Could it have been Dexter?" Calahan asked. "How did Ralph Dexter get a hold on Pete in the first place? From all I can gather, Pete had never been outside the country nor mixed with communists. He had gone to school and gotten his degrees, then gone into some research lab. Suddenly for no reason he started handing over the research to a mysterious figure he called Ralph Dexter. Why?"

"We can find that out some day," Carter said. "Meanwhile let's stick to the main line of thought. Item one is the identity of Ralph Dexter. Item two is the nature of Pete's dream. Was it just a dream?"

Calahan and Bill Nichols remained silent.

"Now for item three," Carter said. "A good F.B.I. girl goes overboard for a traitor and eventually marries him. And she was in that dream too. Not with the appearance that she had sitting beside Pete on the plane, but with her true appearance. And because of her we protected this proven traitor and have been protecting him all these years."

"Putting it that way," Calahan drawled, "it makes us items four five and six."

"Don't try to confuse things," Carter said. "Item four is the mysterious appearance of Father Sprague out of the heart of China, to walk into a cafeteria and calmly join up with Pete and Doris in a research that they've been engaged on ever since. A search for a something called the human soul. And get this: he fled China because he had had a dream in which someone by the name of Archer showed him he would be killed if he didn't! And that very name, Archer, was the open sesame that made Pete unhesitatingly join up with him."

"Then," Calahan said, "Archer must be a real name."

"Not necessarily," Carter said. "Try this for size. Pete and Sprague grew up in the same neighborhood."

"Sounds—but maybe it isn't—

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far fetched," Calahan said. "Go ahead."

"Item five," Carter said. "On August the fourteenth in 1969 eight hundred babies all the same age to within a few days, and all approximately two months old, are left on widely distributed doorsteps according to a very classical pattern. In a basket with soft baby blankets over them. From the Atlantic to the Pacific, with no more than three to a city and all in cities of over a hundred thousand population. Those babies seem to be ordinary normal kids, but all of them develop the same peculiar mental power when they get older. The ability to influence matter by direct thought."

"The crux of the matter," Calahan whispered.

"Item six," Carter said. "Ashbrook happens to be the friend of a botanist who happens to discover a child who can make birdseeds grow into something shaped like birds. That friend happens to get killed. Ashbrook happens to be left in the key position in a chain of movements that will result in all those children being brought together and protected by the government while they develop under his guidance and direction."

Bill looked at Calahan. "That was your idea," he said, "that the criminal would return to the scene of the crime."

"Oh, you thought of that too?" Carter said with satisfaction.

"Yes," Calahan said. "I predicted that when the Mentalphysic Foundation is a going concern it wil have in its setup at least one o those who created those kids."

"Item seven, Pete, Sprague, an Doris go underground," Carter said "Item eight, Arthur Arbright van ishes." He paused, then said, "We'r going to Spokane and start trackin down the original of Nichola Archer."

* * *

A city street map disclosed th dismaying fact that there wa no Archer Street anywhere inside th city limits. A trip to the main l brary by Bill Nichols finally locate it as a short stretch of eight block that had been absorbed into th giant trans-city freeway that ha been laid in 1958.

Calahan made the next trip t the library. He established the fa that a William Sprague Sr. had li ed on Archer St. during the yea 1929 through 1930. And a Josep Hart had also lived on that stre from 1927 through 1942.

Carter paid a visit to what ha been Archer Street only to find th the six lane divided freeway occ pied whatever ground residences o both sides of Archer might have o cupied.

Nichols went to the City Ha and compiled a list of all proper owners on Archer Street in the ye

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)34. One man owned almost half e units, so two days were spent Calahan and Bill Nichols in sys-natically searching the 1934 city rectory for the names of all resi-nts on that street.

When they were done they had list of eighty-six names. None of em were Dexter.

"But," Herb Carter said, "one these names belongs to the man 10 became the symbol Nicholas cher."

Another trip to the library with e list of names brought the 1978 dresses of fifteen of the names it had lived on Archer Street in 34.

Each of them took five of the mes and called on them as "a ter who is compiling a book about okane and its history, and I especially interested in pictures people who lived here in the pe-l 1929-36."

In the end they had four pic-es of men who answered some-at the description of Nicholas her. All four were now dead.

"I don't know," Carter said ir-bly, glaring at the four pictures. one of these look quite like a n with such an indelible person-y that he would have impressed self the same way on the sub-scious of two small boys. We've looked one of the most obvious . Schoolteachers."

Sprague probably went to a holic school," Calahan said. "Maybe Pete did too. I don't re-member if he had been a Catholic on his file at the office."

Calahan obtained the names and addresses (at the time) of all the public gradeschool teachers in the school that Pete would have gone to.

Bill Nichols took the name of Peter Hart and called on the only one still in Spokane, representing himself enthusiastically as an old gradeschool alumnus looking up old acquaintances. As he had hoped, the feeble old lady who had at that time been quite young brought out a small trunk of pictures.

For over an hour he listened with eager nods and pretended fond recol-lections while she relived her past.

And then she brought out a pic-ture, holding it against her aged bosom with almost reverence. "This is the only man," she said with quavering emphasis, "who could have made me give up my teaching career —if he had asked me to." She sigh-ed and turned the picture so Bill could see it. "But he never did," she added.

Bill didn't hear her. He was star-ing at the portrait. It was just the head and neckline of a man, but there was no mistaking the high in-tellectual forehead, the bright twink-ling eyes and sensitive almost mock-ingly laughing lips, and the firm jaw and graying hair.

"What was his name?" he asked.

"Don't you remember him?" Miss Prinz exclaimed. "Why of all things,

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not to remember your own teacher, Tom Orphen!"

"Sure I remembered," Bill said. "Whatever happened to him?"

She dropped the picture back in the trunk and started to put the enormous pile of pictures in on top of it.

"Here, let me do that," Bill said. And when he had them all in the trunk the picture of Tom Orphen was safely inside his shirt.

"He was your second grade teacher," Miss Prinz was saying. "Later on he taught at one of the high-schools, and then he went to Seattle to the university and taught economics." Her voice dropped to a tragic remembrance of lost love.

Bill stood up, ready to leave. But there was one other thing. "I wonder what ever became of Bill Sprague," he said.

"Oh yes," Miss Prinz said. "I was always having the most trouble with him. I heard he became a priest when he grew up."

Bill nodded with the proper air of amazement, and left with swift gracefulness.

That evening Carter and Calahan studied the portrait of Tom Orphen and nodded in solemn awe. And the eyes in the picture twinkled at them in silent merriment.

* * *

BACK in Seattle Carter called the University Administration Building and enquired about a teach they had had several years ago b the name of Thomas Orphen, wh he said, was a long lost brother. Th girl who had answered promised look it up.

Carter gave her his number. was an hour before she called bac

"I'm awfully sorry about the d lay," she said pleasantly. "I ha to look it up in the office archive He was with us from 1942 un 1949 in the economics departmer That was a long time ago. He r signed in the middle of school b cause of ill health."

"Do you know where he we then?" Carter asked.

"No. I can give you the addre where he lived then, and perha there will be someone there wh might know. It was 4607 Fifteen Northwest. Right off the campus

"Thanks very much," Carter sai hanging up.

It was an old rooming house. Th landlady was almost as old, but nic in appearance.

"How long have you had th place?" Carter said.

"Oh my lands," the landlady sai "More years than I care to remer ber."

"Were you here in 1949?" Wh she nodded he held out the pi ture. "Remember him?"

"Tom Orphen?" she said, taki the picture wonderingly. "Of cours He was here for several years. H took ill in 1949 and had to qu

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teaching. He stayed on until 1951, then went east, I think. Just a minute. I may still have his forwarding address."

She led the way to her own room and brought a well worn ledger out of a dresser drawer. She turned the yellowed pages and finally ran her finger down a column.

"Here it is," she said. "Tom Orphen, 1908 Sherman, Evanston, Illinois."

Carter blinked slowly while he etched the address in his memory.

"You say he was ill in 1949 and fifty and fifty-one?" he said. "That's a long time to be ill. What was wrong with him?"

"I don't know. He never said. But he was very ill. Stayed in bed most of the time and had his meals served to him. Got to be nothing but skin and bone. We all thought he was going to die, but he didn't."

"Maybe he died later in Evanston," Carter suggested. "Ever hear from him after he left?"

"N-no," the landlady said. "I don't think there were any letters came to be forwarded either."

Up in the room again Carter told Bill and Calahan what he had learned.

"So he was very ill when Pete had his dream about him," he said. "Well, he wasn't dead, anyway, so it was only a dream." He grinned. "I dreamed about a blonde at the office once, but she didn't give any evidence of knowing about it later."

"We giving up on Orphen now?" Bill asked hopefully.

"No," Carter said. "Not until we find his grave."

That afternoon they boarded a plane for Chicago.

* * *

THEY had dinner in Evanston after getting off the helicoptor shuttle plane at the landing station atop the postoffice roof.

Then Carter, armed with the picture, went to 1908 Sherman and enquired about Orphen. The place was another incredibly old house that had long been a rooming house. The person who answered the door was a girl in her teens.

"I'm looking for a brother of mine whom I haven't seen in many years," Carter said. "I've traced him to this address where he came in 1951. Would anyone be here that lived here then?"

The girl looked at him shrewdly. "Sure you aren't a bill collector?" she asked.

"Cross my heart," Carter said. "Anyway, a bill that old would be outlawed by now."

"I'll call mother," she said.

Carter leaned against the door frame for five minutes until a woman came to the door. There had been quite a bit of talking somewhere toward the back of the house, so he presumed the girl had repeated everything he had said.

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He held out the picture of Tom Orphen. "Know him?" he said.

"Yes," the woman said. "Julius Vandermeer. He's your brother?"

Carter was so unprepared for this that he opened his mouth to correct her. But she had turned away. She went to the wall phone and pressed a button beside it. From the upstairs hall sounded two short and one long sound of a buzzer.

"Yes?" a male voice sounded down the stair well.

"Your brother's here to see you," the landlady shouted.

She smiled at Carter, then padded back the way she had come through a door at the back of the hall.

Carter stood in the doorway listening to footsteps approach leisurely down the stairs. His eyes were fixed unblinking on the spot where the man would first appear.

But in his mind was nothing but anticipatory disappointment, for this could not possibly be the man he was searching for. It was impossible.

And then the man had rounded the turn and come into view, still coming down the stairs with no change of pace. And the face Carter saw was the living duplicate of the one in the picture he held in his hand. The same intelligently sensitive smile, the same twinkling eyes and grey hair combed back in a loose pompadore.

"Won't you come in?" he said, his voice low and courteous. "I hope you will excuse the condition of my room. I'm rather careless, and I wasn't expecting callers today."

For just a moment as he followed the man the landlady had called Julius Vandermeer up the stairs Carter was unsure of himself, of his sanity, of his ability to cope with things.

Then they were in a room lined with bookshelves full of assorted volumes and he was being invited to sit down.

Vandermeer closed the door carefully and sat down on an old kitchen chair, holding himself erect and away from its back. His lips quirked into a smile of friendliness.

Carter opened his mouth, let it hang open while he tried to concentrate, then let it close slowly.

"I'm sorry to give you such a shock," the man said. "Believe me, if I had had time I might have prepared a grave for you to meet at the end of your search."

"You know why I'm here?" Carter asked.

"Of course. You have been tracking down a man whom you knew as Nicholas Archer. That led you to Miss Prinz and the picture of Tom Orphen you have in your hand. In Seattle you learned this address and came here to try to trace me further. You were surprised I'm still among the living, and am going under the name Julius Vandermeer."

"If you know that much you must know the rest," Carter said.

"I know that you are Herbert

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Carter. Is that what you mean?"

"Do you know where Pete and Sprague are?" Carter asked.

Vandermeer nodded. His eyes were two pools of merriment. Carter studied him. The man's face was a network of deep wrinkles with smooth skin in between that was fine-pored and almost youthful. He could be ninety. An unusually hale ninety. But he looked more nearly in his fifties.

"I don't feel like asking questions," Carter said. "I don't know how I feel, except that everything feels unreal to me right now, after finding you here—and alive. But I don't feel like asking you questions. I wish you would just tell me everything. Everything."

"But I don't know everything," Vandermeer said. He appeared to be thinking for a moment. Abruptly he said, "I'll try to explain some of the things that I know are troubling you. In that way you will learn more about it. Has Doris' brother explained to you what Father Sprague explained to him about the mind plane?"

Carter nodded. "Of course, I may not have it straight. And I've been inclined to be skeptical about it, but I'm listening."

"It's a very complex subject. There are many defects in it. *Spread,* as we call the phenomenon of memory duplication from one brain to another, is spotty and by no means understood."

"I imagine not," Carter murmured dryly.

"Moreover," Vandermeer went on, "even where there is contact with the *carrier* it is almost impossible to do anything. The average person is afraid of insanity and has distorted ideas about insanity, so the natural bridge to the conscious from the unconscious is walled in by an automatic fear reflex. It is only rarely that one can find a responsive and properly passive carrier in one's spread.

"All of this comes under the heading of what we used to call spiritualism on the one hand, and reincarnation on the other. Perhaps without exception every human is a carrier, not of just one element of one other mind, but many elements of many other minds. Under proper conditions of passiveness those can be brought to the surface of consciousness or bypass consciousness and manifest themselves in speech. Then the person is or was considered to be the incarnation of a man who lived a century ago; a woman who lived several centuries ago, and so on. But these are merely the manifestation of various psyches which have contact in that particular brain by means of the part of their mind that finds residence in that brain.

"To come down to particular cases, part of my mind has carbon copy duplication in the brains of Peter Hart and in William Sprague.

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Under certain states of emotional stress I can consciously commune with them on the mind plane as though it were actual reality in the physical world. That explains their dreams. Do you understand?"

"I—I think so," Carter said.

"Unfortunately I have no contact with you," Vandermeer said sadly. "If I did I could possibly have helped you. In many respects the mind plane is like a vast hall filled with people all talking at once. You can hear those near you, and pick up bits of conversation not intended for you. In that way I have been able to sit back, so to speak, and be aware of much. So I am aware of what you have been doing and of the forces that move you. And I am only one—or I should say the focus of only a few—of the psyches that could help you."

"Okay," Carter said. "What's behind those children? Where did they come from and what is the plan behind them?"

"We don't know," Vandermeer said. "We don't know."

"All right," Carter said doggedly, "where can I find Pete and Sprague and Doris?"

"You can find them in Washington D.C. most impatiently awaiting you," Vandermeer said.

Carter stared at him in disbelief, took out a cigar, and bit off the end.

"Look, Vandermeer or Orphen or Archer or whoever you are," he said. "I want to bring Calahan and Nichols over to see you before I leave, but . . ."

"Yes?"

"I have a feeling that I won't find you again. When I bring them over you won't be here. How about walking over with me to where I left them?"

"I'd be delighted," Vandermeer said, rising. "Wait until I get my hat." He started toward a door at the far end of the room.

"Oh no you don't!" Carter said. "You're not getting out of my sight until they meet you." He smiled bitterly. "Can't you see my sanity depends on it?"

Vandermeer opened the door he had been about to open. Slowly he reached into the darkness with one hand, and slowly he brought it into sight again, holding—a hat.

"Shall we go?" he said.

* * *

CALAHAN and Bill Nichols reacted the same way Carter had to the sight of Julius Vandermeer. Carter, having recovered a little, watched them with silent amusement.

The man warned them to call him Julius, because a lot of people in Evanston knew him by that name. And he proved to be an excellent companion for the evening. And host.

"I'm sorry the landlady doesn't have enough beds to put you up," he said. "I'll get you a room at the

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hotel." When he reached the hotel manager on the phone he explained, "My brother whom I haven't seen in almost twenty years is in town for the night. With two companions. I would like them to have the very best, and bill it to me." And from the sounds over the phone it was obvious the hotel manager knew him and would fall all over himself pleasing the brother of his very good friend.

Each of the three was studying the man whom they had first learned of as a character in a dream. Bill Nichols was thinking of Miss Prinz and understanding how it was possible for her to love this man who had once touched her life. Calahan and Carter were seeing in him the schoolteacher in his classroom, erect, superior in a good way, full of understanding and good humor.

But throughout the entire evening the subtle aura of unreality hovered about Nicholas Archer, erstwhile Julius Vandermeer. The intelligence that seemed to shine from his eyes and bathe them with waves of psychic laughter seemed too godlike to belong to a living breathing man.

Imperceptibly and perhaps unconsciously the three hard and experienced F.B.I. men crept back into their respective childhoods, emotionally, and became as little boys in a classroom under the influence of their teacher.

And Julius Vandermeer talked, easily and authoritatively. He painted for them a picture of the human race climbing up out of the ancient past, groping as it reached for understanding of the things that drove it on, and still groping.

"Gradually," he said, "as experience accumulated, a picture was built up of something that became known as the astral plane. Here and there a person learned how to free himself of the bonds of confinement to one body and apparently travel in this world called the astral. And there he met those who were dead. Those who no longer possessed a living body. Logic being what it is, it was natural for those rare individuals who experienced these things to become convinced of the existence of a spiritual realm independent of living man.

"A few of us, however, began to see how it might not be entirely divorced from living contact. But it remained for William Sprague and Peter Hart to penetrate to the basic, material structure of the astral."

Julius Vandermeer talked. And it wasn't until he was gone that the three began to realize that they had been lulled into passiveness by the very magnetism of his personality and voice and that the one thing he had carefully avoided, the one things they should have insisted upon learning, and would have under normal circumstances, was his true identity.

"God!" Calahan breathed as he

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watched the skyline of the Capitol rise over the horizon as their plane dropped in preparation for landing. "Do you realize we don't know any more about Nicholas Archer now than we did before? He taught school under the name of Tom Orphen. He lives in Evanston under the name Julius Vandermeer. From what we know he must be at least ninety, but he doesn't look over sixty. And did we get his fingerprints? No."

"Well," Bill said "we know where he lives now and can find him again."

"Want to bet?" Calahan snorted.

* * *

CARTER rose from his desk and came around it to meet the three who came in. He had never seen Sprague before and had had only a brief glimpse of Pete way back in 1950. And he wasn't supposed to know Doris. He said hello in just the proper questioning tone of one who is confronted with total strangers.

They introduced themselves. Carter invited them to be seated. He sat down behind his desk again, wondering how closely they kept in touch with Nicholas Archer alias Julius Vandermeer, and how much of this meeting would be play-acting on their part too. Doris of course didn't count. It gave him a warm feeling to see the affectionate glow hidden in her eyes. It was her secret message to him that she was glad to see him again.

"We have just learned something recently," Sprague said, acting as spokesman, "It's placed us in a quite delicate position. We came straight to you about it."

"Yes?" Carter said. "Tell me about it." He studied the ex-priest. The man was tall and well built, with an openly honest face. The type you trust.

"My colleague and I," Sprague said, "have been engaged on research for many years. In our field we have probably advanced more than anyone else we know of anywhere. We have just learned of a great crime that has beencommitted . The knowledge necessary to have done this thing is the type of knowledge that could be construed as being ours and only ours through our research. In other words, suspicion would point directly to us. So it places us in a distinctly uncomfortable position."

"Sounds quite involved," Carter said, smiling dryly.

"On the other hand," Sprague went on, "we are probably in a better position to find out what's behind it than any other scientists in the world. So we talked it over and came to the conclusion that we should volunteer our services in spite of the risk of being ourselves suspected of being the criminals."

Pete and Doris nodded.

"Suppose you tell me what this

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crime is," Carter said.

"I think you have been told of it," Sprague siad. "It's about those several hundred children left on doorsteps eight or so years ago, who are now developing strange mental powers."

"You begin to interest me," Carter said, pretending surprise. "We've been very careful to keep it out of the papers. How did you learn of it?"

"A friend who has been interested in our research for many years learned of it," Sprague said. "In fact, he brought a professor from the University of Washington down to our laboratories who was interested in it, and while this friend was there he told us about it."

"I see," Carter said. "You say this is in line with the type of research you have been doing? Just what is that research? And what makes you think anyone could connect you with those children?"

"Our main objective," Sprague said, "has been a scientific search for proof of the existence of the soul. We have developed things which could lead to remarkable results in the study of the mind. In fact, we demonstrated some of these devices to Dr. Ashbrook, and I believe he became suspicious of us."

"I see," Carter said. "Just where is this laboratory of yours?"

"South of Flagstaff, Arizona, about thirty miles," Sprague said. "But we have temporarily closed shop down there and crated our instruments and brought them with us." He smiled. "You see, we realized that soon we would either be arrested on suspicion of having been behind the appearance of these strange children in the world, or we would be invited to assist in studying them and trying to solve the mystery of their presence. So we came ready to go to work or be locked up."

"Arizona," Carter said musingly. "You may be in more trouble than you think. One of those children was apparently kidnapped recently, and a truck bearing an Arizona license was seen picking the child up."

"What?" Sprague said. "Surely you don't think . . ."

"That you would pack up, go to Seattle and kidnap that boy, then drive all the way to Washington D.C. with him and calmly call on me?" Carter said. He shook his head slowly. "In this business we don't get results by deciding who looks honest and who doesn't." He let that sink in, then asked, "Where are you staying? And where's your truck parked?"

THERE was a gasp from Doris. "Are you going to hold us?" she asked.

"I'm just going to ask you to remain here with me while I have a man check on your truck, and another check on where you're stay-

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ing," Carter said.

Sprague gave the necessary information.

"So it is a truck," Carter said. He lifted the phone and gave his orders, then leaned back and waited. After a few minutes he said, "Tell me more about this research."

"I'm afraid Mr. Glass can tell you more about the instruments than I can," Sprague said.

Carter turned his eyes to Pete.

"The instruments are developments from other electronic devices," Pete said. "One is the electroencephalograph combined with what you would know as a small television receiver, though it's known as an oscilloscope. Our advance over existing models and techniques lies in the circuit that picks up and amplifies the various energy patterns given off by the brain. Another is a device that sets up and concentrates various energies in any spot in the brain we choose, and causes the cells in that spot to become more active. The two work together to a large extent."

"I see," Carter said. "And just what have you been able to do with them so far?"

"Quite a bit," Pete said. "For one thing, we've been able to study the brain in detail without the necessity of surgery, and learn a lot of what each part does."

"And for another," Carter interposed, "you have been able to manipulate each part and see what happens?"

"I see what you're driving at," Sprague said. "But I assure you if we were able to make supermen we would first make ourselves into them."

"How do I know you haven't?" Carter took out a cigar and bit off the end. He was aware of Doris watching him, a light of homesickness for the old days in her eyes. He leaned back and relented a little. "I'm sorry I've put you on the defensive," he said. "I really didn't intend to. While we're waiting I'll tell you a little of what is being done. I think there's going to be a place built where all these children will be brought together, partly for study and partly for safety. Theirs and ours. A government committee has charge of that. Dr. Ashbrook will probably be in charge of the Foundation. I'm quite sure that once suspicion has been ended against you, that you will be invited to assist him. At least I hope so. We certainly want to find out all we can about these strange children. Just a minute." The phone had rung.

He picked it up and listened. Finally he hung up and smiled at the three who were watching him.

"You can relax," he said. "Not only did we find no trace of the missing boy, but we also found something you probably wouldn't have thought of. An oil change sticker put on at Flagstaff before you left. It

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had the mileage on it, and your speedometer doesn't show enough mileage for you to have gone to Spokane before driving here."

Sprague's face lit up. "Why of course!" he said. "I'd never have thought of that. I was wondering how we could prove we hadn't kidnapped that child."

"Just a minute while I call Major Smith of the Committee," Carter said. "I think I can arrange an appointment. You'll want to get to work on these children as soon as possible, I gather."

"We certainly would," Sprague said. "I'm intensely interested in them."

Carter made the appointment for them for ten the next morning. After they had gone he called in Nichols and Calahan. "What'd you find?" he asked.

"I found their truck," Nichols said. "It's a panel delivery. Loaded with boxes that probably contain their machines and papers. I went over it carefully in search of anything that could belong to a child or show that a child had been in the truck. Nothing."

"I went to the hotel where they're registered," Calahan said. "Plenty of clothing, but nothing that could be connected with a child. I found out that some of their clothing had been sent to the hotel laundry. I got it before it was washed and examined it especially for things like stains and dirt marks. Nothing."

"Well, that's that," Carter said. "I don't see who else could have kidnapped Arthur, but I'm glad they've been careful, if they did it."

* * *

CARTER made a point of getting to Major Smith's office before ten o'clock. He found that Ashbrook had also made a point of doing that. They met in the hall.

"Hello!" Ashbrook said, none too friendly.

"I'm glad you're here," Carter said. "Let's go into Smith's office. I want to talk to you two before Sprague and Glass arrive."

Ashbrook and Major Smith looked at Carter with open hostility, waiting for him to say what he wanted to say.

"What I want to say will have to be brief," Carter said. "We've investigated Sprague and Glass thoroughly, even to going over their things here with great care to see if any sign of a child could be uncovered. We can prove they couldn't possibly have gone anywhere near Spokane since they left Flagstaff.

"Now this is what *I* want. I want you to accept them and play along with them. If they're innocent of the whole affair they can probably do more toward solving the mystery of the children than anyone else alive. If they're responsible for the whole thing, we can keep them under closer scrutiny if they're in our camp.

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If either of you have any other idea worth listening to let's hear it now."

"I'm in favor of having nothing to do with them," Major Smith said.

"We haven't time to bandy words," Carter said. "That plan is sheer stupidity."

"Then arrest them," Smith said. "Impound their equipment and let us duplicate it so we can proceed without them."

"I wouldn't advise going that far," Ashbrook said. "We can't impound their experience, and I'm inclined to believe that's as important as their equipment. After all, Major, a war is fought with strategy based on experience and training as well as on armament. I don't like those two men, but I think I agree with Mr. Carter. We should get them under our constant observation by inviting them into our camp to work with us."

"Then it's settled," Carter said quickly, standing up and going to the door. "I'll get out before they arrive."

He escaped while Major Smith was struggling with some way of overriding Ashbrook. In his office he settled down to the day's work. Reports were in a neat pile on his desk.

No trace of Arthur Arbright had been found yet. Three trucks with Arizona license plates on them had been investigated in the state of Washington. The person who claimed to have seen Arthur picked up by such a truck was quite positive none of the trucks was the one.

Hanson was tracing more details of Ashbrook's life and doing a good job of it, but without uncovering anything that could possibly connect him with the mystery of the children, or even unusual work connected with psychology. As Hanson put it, "His life is so normal that it's suspicious."

Men had been assigned to keep an eye on Julius Vandermeer. They reported he was still at his address in Evanston and showed no sign of getting out. The report added that they were sure Vandermeer was aware of being watched, and seemed amused by it.

"No wonder!" Carter muttered. "He can do more while sick in bed than the average man can with an organization behind him."

Calahan came in at eleven.

"They went to the Pentagon at five to ten," he said. "They were still in there when I turned it over to Ed Brown. Doris knew I was on their tail but didn't give me away. We ought to get her alone and have a frank talk with her before long, Herb."

"I've been thinking that myself," Carter said. "I wish she'd make the move herself."

"Another thing," Calahan said. "Maybe we should start looking into the past life of Luntz. I've been thinking that of all those we've run across he shows most chance of be-

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ing Ralph Dexter—if that guy's still in the picture in any way."

"Good idea," Carter said. "I'd give plenty to find out what Pete can tell us about his connection with Dexter. How'd Dexter get a hold on him in the first place? Why did Pete agree to sell out his country, then decide not to? Damn it, we can't find that out without giving Doris away. Sometimes I wish we had gone ahead and arrested him. Maybe none of this would have happened then."

"And maybe it would have happened, and we wouldn't have the first idea of how to go about handling those kid menaces," Calahan said.

"That's right," Carter sighed. "It may be that their twenty-eight years of research is the only thing that's going to do us some good. About Luntz, you have on in with him Take a run out to Seattle and get him to talking about himself, then check on what he says."

"Okay," Calahan said, starting toward the door. He paused when the phone rang.

"A possible line on Arthur Arbright," Carter said when he hung up. "Contact Dr. Beaumont when you get to Seattle. You can look into that and Luntz at the same time."

* * *

AFTER Calahan left Carter rushed through other business that had piled up. He was almost ready to go out for lunch when a long distance call came through from Seattle. It was Hanson.

"I've been taking my time going through Ashbrook's files," he said. "When I get through I'm going to quit the F.B.I. and put out my shingle as a consulting psychologist and occultist."

"I'll accept your resignation," Carter said. "Who knows? Maybe I'll even be your first patient."

"Here's something I ran across," Hanson said. "It's why I called. A mimeographed booklet put out by Sprague and Glass with a Flagstaff address."

"What?" Carter said.

"I thought it would interest you," Hanson said smugly. "It was sent to K. E. Bealle. The postmark date is May 5, 1965."

"What's in the booklet?"

"A report on study of the brain by the use of electronic probes. I've read it. It stresses that so far the work is merely preliminary, and its main object is to find a path of research that will lead to discovery of the human soul."

"Good work," Carter said. "See if you can uncover any further correspondence on that. And get that photostated for me."

Bill Nichols came in as he was hanging up. "Ready for lunch Herb?" he asked. "This keeping out of sight is getting me. I'd hate to run into Sprague and Pete here.

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They'd wonder what a no good drinking brother-in-law was doing here, and sober."

"Be with you in a couple of minutes," Carter said. "Here's something for you to chew on meanwhile. Ashbrook knew about Sprague and Pete and their work as early as May 1965. That was a little over five years before the appearance of the children."

"So they know Ashbrook!" Nichols said.

"I didn't say that. He was on their mailing list as K. E. Bealle." Carter paused. "And there's a strong possibility that he doesn't remember it. He was probably getting lots of literature through the mails under his pen name. He might not even have read it, but just stuck it away in his files for future reading. You know how such things go."

"Or," Nichols said, "he may remember it perfectly well and isn't admitting it. That would be something."

The phone rang again. "Busy morning," Carter said, answering it. After he hung up he said, "You'll have to eat alone, Bill. That was Major Smith. Friendly for a change. He wants me to come over and join him and Ashbrook and Sprague and Pete and Doris for lunch." He got his hat. At the door he said, "It might be a good idea for you to go to Seattle. Calahan left for there this morning. He might need you."

* * *

CARTER saw that Major Smith's cordiality over the phone was going to extend to the lunch. He suspected the reason and didn't know whether to be happy about it or not, after having learned that Ashbrook had known about the ex-priest and his work five years before the children arrived.

He didn't get the information until well into lunch. Then, with important clearing of throat and meaningful glances at the others, Smith announced, "After a quite lengthy conference with the scientists Sprague and Glass, Ashbrook and I have decided that they should conduct their future work within the Mentalphysics Foundation as staff members. Only minor details are left to be ironed out, such as ownership rights on anything they discover in line with their previous research while in the employ of the Committee."

"That's certainly good news," Carter said. "I was of the same opinion myself. By the way, how soon will the Foundation be ready to move into?"

"Several months yet," Smith said. "However, we have most of the children at an army training center not far from where the permanent Foundation is going to be. They're going out and take charge within three or four days. I'm going along temporarily."

"I wonder who it could have been who kidnapped that child in Seattle?" Sprague said. "It seems to me

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that whoever did must be connected with whoever brought them into existence."

"Why?" Carter asked. "Because he was attracting too much attention?"

"That wasn't my line of reasoning on it," Sprague said. "I was wondering how anyone else could. Dr. Ashbrook has been telling me all about Arthur. I should think if he were kidnapped by someone by force he could protect himself and escape. Unless whoever kidnapped him had the ability to counteract such mental forces."

"I'd never thought of that angle," Carter said.

"Are there any new results?" Major Smith asked.

"One of my men just flew to Seattle to investigate a new lead that's come up. I should have a report on that by morning."

"What kind of a lead?" Smith asked.

"It was a long distance call directly to me," Carter said. "A Dr. Beaumont. He refused to discuss it over the phone. Very cagey."

"Dr. Beaumont?" Ashbrook said. "That's the doctor, or one of them, who tried to save Fletcher's life. Hmm. I can't imagine what kind of a lead he could provide unless . . ."

"Unless what?" Carter said.

"If someone else had died with the same symptoms. But that's absurd. Arthur was quite wrought up about it. If it happened again it would have to be deliberate, and I can't imagine Arthur deliberately killing anyone."

"Unless it was the kidnapper," Smith said.

"That could be," Carter said. "I think you have something. Everything else is under control here in Washington. I may fly out there if that turns out to be it. This may be the lead we've been waiting for."

Carter let the others carry most of the conversation for the rest of the meal. He studied Ashbrook, trying to detect some sign that he had known Sprague and Pete before. He studied the ex-priest, recalling all he knew about the man. And Pete. Pete was quiet, very seldom saying anything but always listening.

And Doris. She was somehow different than he had expected her to be. She had a ready smile for him, but it was as impersonal as that of any stranger. It was as though she had cut him off from her completely, with no intention of ever giving him her full confidence again.

Should he excuse himself and go to a phone booth and write a note to her, asking for a secret rendezvous? He decided against that. She undoubtedly knew he wanted to talk to her. The fact that she didn't call him or otherwise give him an opportunity to be alone with her for a brief word was proof enough that she either had nothing to tell him or nothing she would tell him. Either way little could be gained by push-

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ing things. He could wait.

"Well," Major Smith said when they were preparing to leave the lunchroom, "we'll go ahead with our plans to get things started in Utah. If you find Arthur he will of course be brought to the center. It will probably take you a few days to follow down this lead. You can get in touch with us here until day after tomorrow. After that we'll be in Utah."

"If it's what I suggested," Ashbrook said, "and I can be of any assistance, let me know."

"I will," Carter said.

He shook hands all around. When he shook with Doris he frowned at her meaningfully, pleadingly, behind a poker expression. She seemed to shake her head imperceptibly behind her mask of friendly casualness, but he couldn't be absolutely sure.

* * *

WHEN he returned to his office it was two o'clock. He sat at the desk in brooding, finger tapping silence for a full five minutes.

An urged formed, to go to Seattle, but to drop off at Chicago and go up to Evanston and have another talk with Vandermeer. He doubted if it would produce anything other than more talking that never pinned anything down. But the urge grew to go. He could leave now, be there by dinner time, and catch a late plane to Seattle.

Finally he gave up struggling. It took almost fifteen minutes to give instructions on routine things that would keep the department going for a few days in case he got tied up in Seattle.

On the plane he jotted down questions he intended asking Vandermeer. He had no intention this time of being awed by the twinkling eyes and fascinating personality of the man.

It wasn't until he saw him round the bend in the stairway that he realized that in the back of his mind he had been convinced he would never see the man in the flesh again. And there he was.

The landlady had remained this time. She stood there smiling, waiting to be introduced. Vandermeer did the introduction, passing Carter off as his brother Herbert.

There was something basically homelike about Vandermeer's rooms this time that Carter hadn't noticed the other time. Instead of being almost nothing but a library, it seemed more a retreat from the world. The books themselves seemed a strong and protective wall against the world.

Vandermeer took Carter's hat and reached past the door at the end of the room to hang it beside his own, smiling at him as he did so. Carter returned the smile, remembering how he had thought the man was going to give him the slip while pretending to get his hat.

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Vandermeer sat down in the only worn chair in the room, obviously his favorite. The walls of books in back of him. Carter fought against the illusions his mind was building up. Without trying he could easily believe that those books were the end of reality, and nothing lay beyond them.

"Tell me about yourself," he said abruptly.

"What do you wish to know?" Vandermeer asked.

"How old are you? What was your original name? Where were you born? Things like that," Carter said.

The man's lips quirked into a repressed smile. "You aren't going to like the answers," he said. "They will be true, though. I have no idea how old I am. Perhaps ninety, within ten years one way or another. I don't know where I was born or when. I don't know what my original name was. As nearly as I can remember from what I was told, I passed successively through more and more distantly related homes. I was probably the child of an unwed young lady who promptly left me with a sister of hers, whose husband set his foot down after a few months and made her choose between turning me over to a foundling home or shoving me off on a cousin. I arrived at the cousin's, and before long was passed on to an aunt or some other relative. Somewhere along the line I acquired the name Tom. When I was approximately twelve I decided to take my fate in my own hands. I was feeling a little sorry for myself when I struck out into the cold world. I hadn't gone far when a local policeman took me in hand. When he asked my name I made one up on the spot. Tom Orphen, spelled with an e. I would have been sent to a poor farm, but the policeman's wife took a liking to me. The man himself seemed quite happy to have me around. Probably because I relieved him of the household chores. They were good to me, and thanks to them I received an education. That was in a small town in Illinois. Christman, I believe. Where I was born I don't know. It could have been less than fifty miles from there, or in China."

"Why China?" Carter asked.

"Just a figure of speech," Vandermeer said. "A small child has little sense of geography. My early life could have included more travelling than I remember, or less. I could have thought a journey of ten thousand miles just a short trip, or I could have thought a trip of ten miles a long journey.

Carter nodded. "What gave you the idea of calling yourself Orphen spelled with an e?"

"I suppose it was one of those things. As I remember, I thought that was the way one spelled orphan. The policeman was a giant who struck terror through me at the time. I told him my name was Tom. When

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he demanded to know my last name I blurted out the word. He asked me to spell it. Probaby because I spelled it with an e he thought it was a proper name."

"So," Carter said, "it's quite possible that you too were left on a doorstep in a basket by someone."

"I see what you mean," Vandermeer said, chuckling. "In fact, I've thought of that myself. However, I don't have the mental powers of this modern generation of *Orphens*."

"Oh no?" Carter said goodnaturedly. He studied the man shrewdly. "Do you know where Arthur Arbright is and who has him?" he shot suddenly.

"Arthur Arbright?" Vandermeer said, frowning in concentration. "Oh. Is that the boy who is missing? I'm afraid I can't help you there. I try to reach out, but all I get is confused response. It may be possible that . . . but no. If I get anything I'll let you know." His lips and eyes smiled. "I do want to help you in every way I can."

"It may be possible that what?" Carter said doggedly. "I want all the help I can get, even if it's only conjecture."

Vandermeer hesitated. "I . . . No. I'm afraid I can't help you there."

"You mean you won't?"

Vandermeer's smile was apologetic for a moment. "I'll be frank to this extent," he said. "If what I thought of were correct I don't believe I would help you even if I knew. If I get some other feeling about the boy's disappearance I will do everything in my power to assist you."

* * *

"I talked to Dr. Beaumont," Calahan said, yawning and stretching. "Then I called you and learned you were on your way here. It's a man who shows the same symptoms that Beaumont says Fletcher did." He slid off his pajamas and headed for the shower.

"Dead?" Carter asked.

"No. Fletcher died when they operated, so this time they decided to shoot things into him to relax nerves and muscles and see if the guy wouldn't get over it. Not much hope, but better than surgery. He's in the Kirkland hospital. Name's David Youngblood. Lives alone out on Evergreen Point which is south of Kirkland seven or eight miles on the shore of Lake Washington. Since you were going to be here I thought I would wait to go out with you."

The shower suspended conversation. While Carter waited Bill Nichols knocked and came in. A moment later Calahan came back, drying himself. "Look up Dr. Beaumont's home phone, Bill," he said. "See if we can get a look at Youngblood this morning if we go over to the hospital."

Bill reached the doctor, who said he would pick them up and drive

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them around the lake to the hospital. Carter had had breakfast on the plane, but had a cup of coffee while Calahan and Nichols ate. Just as they finished they were paged. It was the doctor, and forty minutes later they were entering the room where David Youngblood lay unconscious.

"Could be the kidnapper," Calahan murmured.

"I don't know about that," Dr. Beaumont said. "His face is quite distorted because of the spasms to the left half of his features." He pulled back the sheets. "You'll notice the same type of thing all over him. Body arched sideways, one leg drawn into a cramped position, one arm so grotesquely positioned that it appears broken, but isn't." He took the chart a nurse handed him. "Hmm. I'm afraid nothing is going to help him recover. I'll give him another four or five hours. Sometime this afternoon I may administer something to see if I can make him recover consciousness. I would like you men to be present."

"All right," Carter said. "Calahan, do you have the patient's address so we can find the place?"

"The Kirkland police gave me that dope," Calahan said. "They'll drive us out there, too."

"Fine," Dr. Beaumont said. "I'll go back to the city. Let's see . . . it's twenty after nine. Suppose we meet here this afternoon at two o'clock."

THE police car driver's name was Frank Henrie. He hadn't been the man called on the case, but had talked enough with the state patrolmen who had to know as much as they did.

"Next door neighbor to Youngblood heard him scream," he explained as he drove his car smoothly past highway traffic. "Went to see what was wrong, and found Youngblood half way between the back door and his private dock. He called the telephone operator, she located the highway boys. They brought him to the local hospital."

Calahan said, "The local doctor recognized the symptoms right away as those Dr. Beaumont had described at a recent meeting of doctors, and got him over at once."

"Oh," Carter said.

They remained silent while the car ate up the few miles, tires screaming on curves. They turned into a narrow graveled road between two lanes of Italian Cypress and emerged in a large plot of thick closely cropped lawn that went down to the lake shore. The house was a two story frame with mansard roof, well kept up.

"Youngblood lives alone," Frank Henrie said, his voice hushed as though already in the presence of the dead. "His wife left him last winter. He has a dog around somewhere."

They got out of the car and went around to the back door. They found

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the dog at the foot of the back steps, lying as though he had fallen the last few steps and dropped. He was dead. His body was distorted in the unmistakable pattern of the thing that had hit its master.

"Just when did it happen?" Carter asked.

"Let's see," Frank Henrie said. "I think it was four o'clock, though it may have been four thirty. Day before yesterday."

Carter felt of the dog. Its body was cold. He stood up and looked toward the lake without saying anything. His eyes took in the dock that extended out from shore forty or fifty feet, the small boathouse that could house a twenty foot motor launch. The waves were lapping gently. There was no other movement.

"Here's what we'll do," he said. "I'll stay here. Load the dog in the car and drop it off at the police station so Dr. Beaumont can examine it later. Bill, you'd better stay with me. Frank, you and Calahan drive over to Seattle and pick up Mrs. Arbright and bring her over as fast as you can. Mr. Arbright too, if he's home."

* * *

"What is it, Herb?" Bill said when the police car pulled out.

"There's just a remote chance that he's still around here someplace," Carter said. "A day and a half—two nights—is a long time. More than likely Arthur was a mile away from here ten minutes after Youngblood let out his scream. But . . ."

"He must still be on this side of the lake, anyway," Nichols said. "Hadn't we better put out a drag-net?"

"Did you see Youngblood?" Carter said. "We're walking on eggs right now. Arthur may be hiding out in that boathouse, with his eye glued to a crack watching us."

"Why don't we go look?" Nichols said.

"We're going to sit down on the bottom step of the back porch and stay there until Arthur's mother arrives," Carter said. "I don't want myself killed by him."

"But—" Nichols' protest ended with a soft whistle of comprehension. "Maybe he would at that! He probably knows what they do to killers. Killing Fletcher was an accident. But this . . ."

"If Youngblood was the kidnapper then Arthur killed him and his dog and made his escape," Carter said. "There's no guessing what he'll do now. But there's also the chance —I can see it now—that he was never kidnapped at all."

"What makes you think that?" Nichols asked.

"The dog," Carter said. "If Arthur ran away from home to escape all the attention that was centering around him, and driven by his guilt feeling at having killed Fletcher, he may have turned in here to get something to eat. The dog start-

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ed after him. In self defense he killed it the same way he had killed Fletcher. Youngblood may have seen part of what went on. He may have come bounding out of the house. Arthur, knowing he had killed the dog, might have thought the man knew it too and was after him. In a panic he used the same method to protect himself from the man."

"And now," Nichols said, "he'll think the police are after him for sure. We are in danger all right, if he's still here."

"I don't think he's still here," Carter said. "It's just a chance. That's all." He sat down on the bottom step, Nichols dropping beside him. "But that's why I'm not going to put out a dragnet. I'm almost afraid to try finding him now. This is one of the things Ashbrook was afraid of, that some of the children would unwittingly do damage with their powers and become warped." He picked up a pebble and tossed it halfheartedly at a beetle a few feet away, missing it by several inches. "I stopped to see Nicholas Archer on the way to Seattle. Had quite a talk with him. He didn't say so, but I can see now that he was inclined to believe Arthur had run away rather than being kidnapped. Now I can see why."

The sound of screaming sirens drifted through the trees. They grew louder rapidly.

"What could that be?" Nichols said. "It's too soon for them to be bringing Mrs. Arbright."

"Damn," Carter muttered. "Henrie wanted to show me how good he is. He probably radioed Seattle and had them rush out and get her and bring her around. Now they'll scare the living daylights out of the kid if he's still within a mile of this place. But maybe it's all right at that. If he's hiding in the boathouse or someplace near he'll be too scared to move."

He was right about the policeman. The two cars came to a skidding stop and Henrie leaped out with a proud grin on his face. Calahan caught Carter's eye and shrugged helplessly.

"Is my boy here?" Mrs. Arbright cried anxiously as she half climbed half stumbled from the Seattle car.

"We don't know," Carter said. "There's a chance he is—or was. We wanted you to be here in case he is. My assistant here, Mr. Nichols, will go with you into the house while you look around. The rest of us will stay outside." He grinned at the sight of Bill's sickly accusing smile.

An hour later it became quite evident that Arthur was no longer around. The house had been explored room by room. The boathouse and the motor launch inside were explored. Mrs. Arbright went wandering among the trees calling pathetically for him, while the local police cannily studied the upper branches of trees to make sure he wasn't hid-

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ing above.

Finally Carter gave instructions for the Seattle police to take her home. Henrie, quite pleased with himself, took the three F.B.I. men into Kirkland. They killed time over their lunch, waiting for two o'clock and Dr. Beaumont's arrival.

* * *

AT two o'clock they walked the two blocks to the hospital. The doctor was there waiting for them.

"There's no change," he said.

"Rather, he's slowly going. I'm quite sure, from my experience with the other case, that he doesn't stand a chance. So I'm going to try to bring him to and give you a chance to get some sort of information out of him." He smiled wryly. "I'd like to ask him some questions too, about what happened to him."

They went upstairs to the room where Youngblood lay. He was a little paler than he had been, with his skin seeming a trifle more oily. Dr. Beaumont spoke to the nurse. She left and came back in a few minutes with a tray on which lay a filled hypo with a needle almost six inches long.

Dr. Beaumont cleaned a spot on the chest of the unconscious man with alcohol. Then with sure movements he slowly pushed the needle in until almost half of it had disappeared.

The three F.B.I. men watched while the fluid drained out of the glass tube. Then they saw that the doctor's attention was fixed on the man's face, and transferred their attention there.

A flush began to appear in the pale skin. The nostrils dilated nervously.

The doctor looked up at Carter and nodded briefly, then turned back to his work. He shoved the plunger in another fraction of an inch, driving more of the fluid into the heart.

Youngblood's eyes fluttered, then slowly opened. They rested on the doctor briefly, then turned to the three others. His lips opened as though he were about to speak, then stayed that way.

He was dead. Life had left him with almost visible departure.

"Too bad," Dr. Beaumont muttered, drawing out the needle. "It was the only chance, and it was very remote."

"He probably couldn't have told us much anyway," Carter soothed. "By the way, his dog was killed in the same way."

Calahan said, "Henrie brought it here. It's downstairs."

"His dog?" Dr. Beaumont said. "Good. I can do some dissecting on it while I'm here."

"If you find anything new get in touch with us," Carter said. "We'll be at the hotel where you picked us up. If we aren't there the local F.B.I. office will locate us for

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you."

They left the hospital and went over to the police station. Henrie drove them back to Seattle while they sat in silence, each thinking his own thoughts.

"I'm going to get some sleep," Carter said when they were alone at the hotel. "Calahan, you pick up your investigation of Luntz. Bill, you can locate Hanson and have him come over here about dinner time. We can all eat together."

When they had gone he undressed. He lay down, then got up and went to the window to close the blinds. He stood there for several minutes, his eyes looking toward the east where he knew Lake Washington lay just beyond the skyline.

Somewhere over there was a pathetic little boy, homesick, perhaps hungry. But most of all afraid. And dangerous. He wondered bitterly if this was the end of the trail in the search for Arthur Arbright. Would he keep wandering until he found someone who would take him in? Would he grow up much as Nicholas Archer had done, to walk life's highway alone?

He turned away from the window and lay down again, closing his eyes. And in his mind's eye the face of Nicholas Archer, erstwhile Julius Vandermeer, looked down at him, smiling its inscrutible smile, eyes twinkling, silver gray hair combed straight back in such a way that it seemed almost a halo . . .

BILL Nichols and Hanson came into the room and turned on the lights. Carter rolled over, blinked at them until his mind was oriented, glanced at his watch and saw it was seven.

He sat up and stretched. "That was a good sleep. I was tired. Where's Calahan?"

"There was a note in your box downstairs," Bill said. "He's invited out to Alfred Luntz's place for dinner."

"Oh yes," Carter said, remembering. "Got anything for me, Hanson?"

"A little," Hanson said. "A photostat of that mimeographed pamphlet. Also photostats of a couple of letters that might interest you." He handed a large gray envelope he had been carrying over to Carter.

Carter slid out the photostats and glanced over the letters. They were from Sprague to K. E. Bealle. They referred to letters that Bealle had written to him.

"They show," Hanson said, "that Ashbrook, as K. E. Bealle, didn't get that mimeographed pamphlet and not read it. He read it and was definitely interested."

"Yes," Carter said, laying them on the bed and standing up. "You've done a good job. Are you through?"

"I've just begun," Hanson said. "Now I'm going through everything again. Maybe there's something to indicate why Ashbrook won't come out now and admit he knew of

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Sprague and his research before."

Carter looked at Bill. "Anything turn up about Arthur Arbright?"

"Not so far. The papers are playing it up now. Strictly from conventional angles. Boy kidnapped a few days ago. Death of a prominent Evergreen Point citizen and his dog, possibly killed by the kidnappers. The police saying there is some evidence that might indicate the boy had escaped from his captors. The kind of thing that will make everyone on that side of the lake be on the lookout for him. Also the inevitable 'F.B.I. called in on the case'."

Carter grunted and started undressing. Ten minutes later he had showered and put on a clean shirt and fresh suit.

"Let's eat," he said.

* * *

IT was almost midnight when Calahan returned. "I'm going to get a typewriter and put down everything Luntz said about himself," he said. "There's a lot we can check up on. He was born on a farm in upper New York state, 'of simple people', and rose to his present affluent state through 'good judgment and perseverence', and lives only for the good he can do in advancing Science. It's a typical picture. Too typical. If I'm any judge then English wasn't the language he spoke as a boy. And if I'm any good at spotting phonies in a poker game, then he's a boy who has picked up his aces from his lap and is quite sure any investigation won't uncover that fact."

"Get a picture of him?" Carter asked. When Calahan shook his head, "Then we'd better have one of the local office gang take a sidewalk camera and stand in front of his laundry in the morning and get one for us. More than one, in fact." He hesitated before asking his next question. "Get his fingerprints?"

Calahan shook his head. "He's too cagey for that. He carefully kept me from using every device in the book without seeming to be aware of it."

"Huh!" Carter grunted. "Maybe we'd better pay a visit to his laundry office and see if we can't get a set."

Half an hour later they pulled to the curb in front of the laundry. Getting out of the car they went boldly to the front door and pushed the button that would summon the nightwatchman. When he showed up, peering through the glass suspiciously at them, Carter showed him his identification. The man opened the door, still suspicious, his suspicions evaporating when he carefully scrutinized Carter's identification and saw he was really dealing with the chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"We have a pretty reliable report that a rival union has planted

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a time bomb somewhere here," Carter said. "It's set to go off shortly after eight o'clock in the morning, so there's little danger now. We've got to go over this place with a fine tooth comb and find it."

Calahan said, "Some more of our men might show up. Suppose you give us your keys and you stay here at the front door to let them in."

The nightwatchman was very happy at this suggested arrangement. He surrendered his keys.

The three went immediately to the room Calahan remembered as Luntz's office. In five minutes they had several prints and were examining them.

"Well," Carter sighed, "they aren't those of Ralph Dexter, but we can use them to trace Luntz down to his true origin. Now we'd better cover up."

They went to the front door, looking very embarrassed.

"We've made a mistake," Carter said. "This is the wrong laundry. We didn't realize it until we tried to find the spot where the bomb was supposed to be planted. Then we realized. And don't say anything about this, will you? That's why we've been called in on it, to keep it very hush hush. We'll go to this other laundry and get the bomb and nothing will appear in the papers or anything. That's very necessary or the union trouble will break out in the open and all the laundries will have to shut down."

The watchman agreed to keep it quiet, with an air of suppressed excitement that showed he had been captured by the idea of high intrigue.

"What about your other men when they arrive?" he asked.

"We'll radio them from the car," Carter said.

* * *

BACK in the hotel they went to Carter's room. Carter paced the floor, a cigar screwed into his face.

"So far we're just scratching the surface," he said. "Eight hundred babies all the same age just can't come into existence without a large organized plan behind them. Especially left on doorsteps like they were. How could it have been done?"

"I've wondered about that myself," Calahan said. "Incubator babies?"

"Let's consider the other alternative," Carter said. "A man and wife who have agreed to try to have a baby on a certain date."

"To immediately leave on the doorstep of some stranger?" Bill Nichols asked, unbelieving.

"Yes," Carter said. "This isn't something ordinary. The parents of each child would have to be convinced that what they were doing was for some purpose they believed in. In other words, they would have to be fanatics. But let's grant that.

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Let's agree for the sake of argument that that is exactly what happened. A large group of married couples believed in something so strongly that they were willing to have a child on a predetermined date, or within a few days of that date. Have it, and then give it up. They'd have to believe in the reason for giving it up, too."

He chewed on his cigar and paced some more. Finally he shook his head. "It just doesn't jell. Why would they want to leave the babies on doorsteps?"

"Maybe because they knew the kids would be too dangerous when they grew up," Bill suggested.

"Hu-uh," Calahan said positively.

"Let's look at it from another angle," Carter said. "What if the parents had kept their children?"

"If that had happened things wouldn't come out as they have," Bill said. "When Arthur's mental powers were discovered the government would have simply refused to form the Mentalphysics Foundation. Or if it had been formed, every whiz kid in the world would have been brought to the front by his mother."

"That's what I'm getting at," Carter said. "Leaving them on doorsteps all on one particular morning *gave them an identifying tag that couldn't be imitated,* except by one or two that would have been normally abandoned in the course of events anyway. In other words, having discovered one, we were able to round up the others."

"So," Calahan said, "it was intended from the first that they be brought into something like the Mentalphysics Foundation to be brought up. And probably the mastermind behind it saw that if that weren't done something like what Arthur Arbright has done would happen."

"Okay," Herb said. "It's pretty obvious what the motive behind abandoning them was. It isn't absolutely certain. There's always the chance that the milkman wasn't crazy, and that he really did see some alien being with wings and the face of a woman. But until we actually run up against such a creature we have to look for things where we stand a chance of finding them."

"That's right," Bill said.

"So if we assume that," Carter went on, "we have to assume a very large organization of fanatics. It seems to me that Sprague, our number one suspect from the standpoint of means to accomplish it is concerned, could have built up such an organization in that time. Since we don't know how the babies were changed, maybe it was done by some portable machine he could carry in his pocket and hook into the light socket."

"I see what you're driving at," Calahan said. "We should get Sprague's mailing list and investigate it."

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"Could it be done?" Carter asked Bill.

"I suppose so," Bill said. "There were several locked files on their truck."

"And by now their truck is at that army base in Utah," Carter said. "In a few days we'd better pay it a visit and see what we can get. First I hope we can locate Arthur and get him home to his mother."

"When that's done," Calahan said dryly, "he will be forced to go to Utah."

"Well, the other mothers were quite excited that their adopted children were causing so much excitement," Bill said.

"Getting back to the subject," Carter said, "we have it as a pretty certain conclusion that those behind the children left them on doorsteps for the express purpose of tagging them so that later when they began developing their special powers they would be rounded up as they are being done, so they could be together and have a chance to develop, financed by the government. We also have two other facts. One, Sprague and Pete from what we know could have discovered the things it took to change newborn babies into supermen, so they could be the ones behind it. Second, we now know that Ashbrook knew all about Sprague's work long before the kids appeared, and in effect denies it by pretending he first heard of them when Luntz took him down to Flagstaff. And Ashbrook is the one who flew to the Capitol to present things to the proper authorities to get things moving. If it weren't for Ashbrook, remember, Dr. Fletcher would have been considered a normal enough death by natural causes. Dr. Beaumont would have made himself forget about the peculiarities in the case. So, just as it appears Sprague and Pete are the only known people who could have created the supernormal abilities in those children, and certainly could have built up an organization of fanatics to make it possible, it also appears that without Ashbrook the obvious second stage of the plan wouldn't have come off."

"Do you suppose," Calahan said, "that Ashbrook's trip to Flagstaff wasn't to 'meet' Sprague, but for them to get together to decide if the time was right for stage two?"

"Yes," Bill said. "It seems to me Luntz is just what he seems to be. It was we who manuevered him into meeting Ashbrook."

"But it was Doris who supplied his name," Carter reminded. "I'm not so sure any more that she isn't in on the whole thing. One thing that makes me think that way is the fact that she deliberately avoided any private talk with me."

"We're getting a pattern," Calahan said. "Our next step is to get a list of all names in the files of Sprague and Pete, and investigate

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them along with Luntz. Here's something else. There's a chance that some of the foster parents of those kids are their real parents. If the object of the doorstep scene was to tag them, why couldn't the real parents do that to their own child to tag it? I think if I were married and faced with that problem that's the way I would solve it rather than giving up my child."

"If that's so," Carter said, "then if Sprague is the mastermind his mailing list will have the names of some of the foster parents on it. We've got to get that list."

"Unless," Carter said, "they've destroyed it or buried it."

"Buried it?" Bill said, jumping up. "Why don't we go down to Flagstaff and search? Maybe, even if they have the list with them, they left a duplicate list down there in a safe or someplace."

"That's something for you to do, Bill," Carter said. "Calahan, you stay here. Get the local office to get a picture of Luntz. Get the checkup on his life story going. Keep in on the search for Arthur. I'm going to Utah. Maybe I can get the mailing list there. If not I can see what develops there while you two are taking care of these tag ends."

* * *

BUT it was five days before Carter arrived at the army base in Utah. An early morning call had forced him to return to the Capitol on other business which kept him for four days. Bill Nichols' search at Flagstaff had been so far unsuccessful. Arthur Arbright was still missing. The checkup on Luntz had tentatively proven he had lied about his place of birth. Those were all of the developments at the moment Carter rode up to the administration building in the army base.

The base covered a thousand acres of wire enclosed flat desert. To the south could be seen the whitish mirror that was the surface of Great Salt Lake. The sun was hot as it hung suspended in the heavy sky, and the tin roofs of the buildings radiated visible heat.

As he entered the building cool air bathed him. He offered a devout prayer for the inventor of airconditioning.

"Major Smith?" the trim Wac said. "Won't you be seated, Mr. Carter?"

A moment later Smith came out and greeted Carter with a warm smile. "Glad you came down," he said. "You'll have to look the place over before you go back."

"I'd like to," Carter said, hiding his dislike of the major behind a smile. "That's why I came down, in fact."

"I'll have to be your guide myself," Smith said. "Ashbrook is quite busy getting schoolwork organized along new lines. Today, I

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believe, he's supervising the general I.Q. and aptitude tests being given the children. He's of the opinion that general intelligence of the children will be much higher than the average for the country."

"What's Sprague and Pete Glass doing?" Carter asked, as he and Smith walked leisurely toward the exit.

"Setting up their laboratory. They're very anxious to start making tests on the children as soon as possible."

"What kind of tests do they have in mind?" Carter asked, blinking against the blinding sun as they emerged onto the blacktop paving in front of the building.

"They've outlined three things they would like to discover. First, of course, is in exactly what way the mental structure of the children differs from the norm, if it does. Second, just what to do to a normal child to turn it into one like these. Third, what to do to turn one of the children into an ordinary child."

"Why do they want to find that?" Carter asked, surprised.

"Isn't it obvious?" Smith said. "Arthur Arbright has killed two men and a dog so far. Any of these children could do the same. We are all of the opinion that it would be much safer, if it can be done, to make all these children normal. Arthur too when he's found."

"Whose idea was this?" Carter asked.

"Well," Smith said self consciously, "I'm not exactly a useless cog in this organization. Of course, it will really be the genius of the ex-priest that will accomplish it. What we would like is to be able to make or unmake children of this type at will. It would be a secret weapon that would forever ensure the supremacy of the United States. Right now if we had the know how we would pick out perhaps fifty of the children that had the desired character traits and leave them as they are, educating and training them for special work in world peace, and return the rest to normalcy. Then we would preserve the know-how and at future times pick out others of coming generations to take the place of those we chose from this group."

"I wonder at what age such a change would become impossible?" Carter murmured.

Major Smith coughed for a moment. "Why, I don't know," he said. "I had presumed the change was possible only in children. Otherwise, why didn't those who created the children acquire that same power for themselves?"

"Why didn't . . ." Carter said, his voice dying out.

"Hello, Mr. Carter," Sprague's voice sounded from a doorway they were approaching.

The ex-priest appeared in the doorway, tall, capable looking, smil-

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ing an easy smile of welcome.

"Hello," Carter said, and he was looking at the man with a new interest. It had never before occurred to him that Sprague, perhaps Pete too, might be in possession of mental powers that would enable them to destroy him without lifting a finger. "Hello," he repeated. He grinned abruptly, his lips pulling back tight over his teeth. "How's things?" The memory of Youngblood in the Kirkland hospital, his body contorted into grotesque agony of shape, hovered before his eyes to blend with the ex-priest's friendly smile.

* * *

"COME in," Sprague invited. "It looks like you're setting up a regular clinic," Carter said when he was inside.

"This *is* a clinic," Sprague said. "Pete and I have our own little niche. The doctors have the rest."

Carter followed Sprague through the waiting room, glancing at the half dozen eight year olds and the assorted grownups sitting there. It was hard to believe that the youngsters were not ordinary ones, seeing them here.

"Part of the initial checkups," Sprague explained. "It's going to take a full two weeks to get them all through it. You'd be surprised how few of the children have had childhood diseases."

He opened a door and led the way along a narrow hall, turning through a door at the back. It led into a three room suite. Consulting office, and two lab rooms.

"I think Pete and Doris are getting their apartment in order," Sprague said. "I've been puttering around, straightening out the mess here."

Carter surveyed what he could see. His eyes rested for a moment on a four drawer steel filing cabinet that had locks on each drawer. The green paint on it was scratched in ways that indicated it had done a lot of travelling. It was the one he wanted to get into.

"In this room over here," Sprague was saying, "are our instruments. I only hope they are still in working order."

"Major Smith tells me you are going to try to find some way of taking this mental power to affect matter away from the children," Carter said.

"Yes," Sprague said. "After all, it's the simplest solution to the whole problem. I think it will be quite feasible, too. Probably the easiest thing to do. We'll get one of the children to use his supernormal faculty and find out where the activity centers. Then we can set up induction currents in that area that will break down enough of the brain circuits to prevent the functioning of that faculty."

"He said you would also try to

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find out how to create that faculty in an adult," Carter said.

"We would like to," Sprague said, laughing. "So far all our thinking is just speculation. We haven't yet examined any of the children. Knowing they exist, though, has raised several points for speculation." He went to the desk and sat down, leaning back and crossing his legs. "I've felt from the start that all human beings have the same faculty latent in them that these children have. Is there some inherited mental barrier to bringing it into use?" He shrugged his shoulders. "It's going to be very interesting to find out. There are strange tales handed down by word of mouth from prehistoric times. Modern man may be a direct descendent of the gods, with his godlike attributes still there but beyond reach because of some acquired characteristic that cut them off from conscious contact."

"You mean that there wasn't some change made in those children when they were babies that gave them that power?" Carter asked.

"I don't see how any change in the brain could be made to give it any power," Sprague said. "It had to be there to start with. Even you have it, Mr. Carter. You just don't know how to contact it, that's all."

"Exactly," Major Smith said.

"I see," Carter said slowly. He thought of Nicholas Archer. Another thought came to him. "Your original research, Sprague, was a search for the soul. Does this have some connection with it?"

"Very possibly," Sprague said.

He didn't elaborate. Carter wanted to pursue the subject but couldn't. He was hamstrung by knowing too many things he wasn't supposed to know, from Sprague's viewpoint, and if he started talking he might give himself away.

The urge possessed him to go to Evanston and see Nicholas Archer again, and perhaps discuss everything with him, frankly. He fought against it. He half listened while Sprague talked and Major Smith made occasional comments. He began to feel that his investigations were all wasted effort. A picture unfolded in his mind, of the Mentalphysics Foundation lifting the human race to new heights. It began to seem unimportant that the children had been brought into existence and left on doorsteps. Nothing but good could come from them anyway. Nothing but good had come from it, except for the minor casualty of Arthur Arbright's killing two men and a dog. And in every great work there were casualties of some sort.

He made a mental note to call off all the investigations except the search for Arthur. He had been wrought up, he reflected. He shoved it all into the back of his mind and listened more attentively to Sprague.

There was no question but what

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Sprague was a very great man. His quiet cultured voice, the reserves of intellect and power behind his calm gray eyes . . .

He wasn't able to understand very much of what Sprague was saying. It was over his head. That's why he had been so wrought up. It was all over his head, outside his province as an F.B.I. man. He had been off base all along. That was why Doris hadn't wanted to speak with him privately in Washington. She hadn't wanted to hurt his feelings.

"Where can I find Doris and Pete?" he asked abruptly.

"Let's all go over," Sprague said.

"I have to get back to the office," Major Smith said. "Drop over after a while, Carter. I'll arrange for a place for you to stay for a couple of days while you see how things are going."

* * *

PETE seemed nervous when he saw him. Carter greeted him warmly to set him at ease, thinking with self condemnation that it was high time he stopped being suspicious of everybody.

"We stopped at Salt Lake City and bought out the town," Doris said.

Carter looked at the new furniture attractively arranged and nodded appreciatively. "You used good taste," he said.

"Let's try out the new bar," Pete suggested.

Doris opened the gleaming cabinet and began mixing cocktails. While they sat around, talking and sipping their cool drinks, Carter did a lot of the talking.

"You're certainly enthusiastic about the Mentalphysics Foundation," Doris said, showing mild surprise.

"Why not?" Carter said gaily. "Out of the atomic research foundations came the atom bomb, and then the hydrogen bomb. Without them the world would now be under communist slavery. But now, out of the Mentalphysics Foundation, will come something far greater. Mankind will return to its inherent kinship with the gods. Who knows what will come about? When man can mould matter by thought alone there will be no limit to what he can do."

"That's right," Sprague said gravely. "The day will come—"

He stopped as a knock sounded at the door. Pete answered it and listened to the man in the hall for a moment, then turned to Sprague. "It's the technician. Maybe we'd better go over and get him started."

Sprague set his drink down. "You two will be all right while we're gone?" he said.

"Oh sure," Carter said. He smiled at Doris with his newfound understanding and sympathy.

Then they were alone.

"I'm glad things are working out all right," Carter said. "You know,

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thinking back over the years, you had the right instinct. Pete was basically okay. I'm glad you fell in love with him." He smiled wryly. "I have to keep watching my step though. It woud never do to slip up and let him find out you were once an F.B.I. girl assigned to get evidence on him that would convict him of treason. I—"

Doris's laugh interrupted him. "You don't have to be careful," she said. "He knows all about it."

A cold bath of sanity flooded through Carter. "He what?" he said.

Doris's smile was playfully mocking. "Of course. Sprague and Pete and I had a grand day of confessing all. It was just before Pete and I got married. Pete started it by telling us his right name and what he had gone. So I couldn't keep quiet about my part and be honest with him."

"Then all these years that Bill has been posing as your brother. . ." Carter said.

Doris went into a gale of laughter. "It was funny to us," she said, "and we didn't know quite what to do about it. We decided it was better to let things go that way. You could keep tabs on Pete and keep satisfied that he was on the straight and narrow. Also we liked Bill and enjoyed his visits."

Carter continued to be outwardly happy and in sympathy with what Doris was saying. Inside he was hastily reviewing the past hour. Had he been hypnotized by Sprague?

He wanted to get away, be by himself, think things out. But he didn't dare excuse himself too abruptly. Or did he? He glanced at his watch.

"Say!" he said. "I've got to get over to Smith's office. He was going to find a place for me to stay in case I wanted to be here a few days. He's probably waiting for me." He stood up. "I'll be back later."

At the door he smiled, watching her closely. She seemed not to think anything wrong.

To make good on what he had said he hurried to Smith's office. Shortly he was unpacking his suitcase in a room that had been assigned him in one of the buildings.

His eyes were cold, thoughtful, as he tried to clarify in his thoughts the implications of the things he had learned.

One outstanding fact stood out above all others. Sprague and Pete knew all the time that Bill Nichols was an F.B.I. man. He didn't know quite what it implied, but it was there.

Perhaps they knew a lot of things. Did they know he had found Nicholas Archer? Probably. Did Archer know that they knew all about what he was doing and thinking? Probably.

Another thing rose into his thoughts. If Pete had confessed all to Doris and Sprague, he had probably told them all he knew about

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Ralph Dexter. It could be nothing or it could be of supreme importance. portance.

For no reason that he could fathom he began to tremble. He had to get away from this place. Get away and regain his perspective. He would send someone else here to steal the mailing list in those locked files.

The thought of seeing Nicholas Archer came into his thoughts. He dismissed it as quickly as it formed. The image of Calahan rose in his mind. Calahan, thin and with the eternal asset of looking like a a born crook. Flat chested and hard as nails, inspiring the confidence of crooks at first glance, but one of the best F.B.I. men that had ever lived.

Almost in a frenzy of nervousness he got the operator and put through a call to Calahan in Seattle. Calahan's lazy, "Hi," made him gasp in relief. He fought for calm, and after a long second managed a casual sounding, "Carter talking. Any developments?"

"I—" Calahan began.

"Use code seven," Carter interrupted.

He listened while Calahan, taking his cue, built up a plausible set of reasons why he was needed in Seattle at once.

"I hate to leave here just now," Carter said. "Hang on while I get Smith on the line to see if it can be done."

* * *

"ON the plane," Carter said nervously, "even now, I keep feeling that nothing's wrong with the setup. I keep thinking that it's perfectly all right to bring eight hundred babies into the world in some way, do something to them that makes them able to affect matter directly by thought, drop them on doorsteps, and sit back until they're eight years old, then go with them into a government backed foundation and guide their development until they are old enough and powerful enough to do what they desire with the rest of the human race."

"Take it easy, Herb," Calahan growled. "You're upset. Sure, it isn't an ordinary simple crime. By ordinary standards it's screwy. If we have the right picture of it we have individual couples having babies on planned dates with the express purpose of taking them to a man who does something to their brain, then abandoning them. Not a serious crime in itself, but still a crime. Taking any single one of those cases we couldn't prove criminal intent or even plan. The law wouldn't be able to touch them. They had a baby, decided they couldn't keep it, and abandoned it under circumstances that would ensure it a good home or at least ensure its being turned over to the authorities in good condition.

"The purpose behind it could only be conjectured. Can you accuse a

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couple of engaging in a plot to conquer the world based on their abandoning a baby? No. Maybe that isn't the purpose. Maybe the purpose will never be known, or at least not until it's too late to do anything about it. But our job still remains what it was. To discover and be able to prove a plan or plans hostile to the existing state of society, set in motion and carried out by definite and proven persons. That's our job. What comes after is up to the government and the courts."

"That's right," Carter said. He stared morosely at his trembling hands. "I wish I could stop this."

"Do you want to know what I think?" Calahan said. "I think that somewhere in that mind of yours everything clicked into place when Doris confessed that Sprague and Pete knew everything about us. Some part of you knows, and is terribly afraid. I'd suggest you spend a few days just relaxing. Stay here. Have your meals sent up. I'll handle things and not bother you unless I have to. Better yet, we'll get a room with two beds so I can be with you most of the time. Give your mind a chance to work things out in peace."

"I don't know," Carter hesitated. "I think I know practically everything. I can't see what would make me go to pieces like this. I've never felt this way in my life."

Calahan frowned. "I'd like to call Dr. Beaumont up here," he said uncomfortably. "He'd give you a sedative and maybe something that would calm your nerves. You aren't going to relax by yourself. You're too tense. I don't know what you've been through to cause it, but it's dangerous."

Carter stared at his hands another moment. "All right," he said finally. "It won't do any harm."

He watched Calahan take the phone and start calling the doctor. He took out a cigar and bit off the end, then stuck it back in his pocket. After that he sat still, staring at the light pattern on the wall formed by the venetian blinds.

* * *

"SO you feel nervous," Dr. Beaumont said when he arrived and Calahan had explained briefly. "Well, I can give you something that will calm you quickly enough. But—I hope you don't mind my being so curious—I'd like to know what you think caused it. It doesn't seem to me, to be frank about it, that you should have a nerve in your body. The chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation didn't get that office by having attacks of nerves when a case didn't go right. And there're those two deaths . . ." His eyes were friendly but concerned.

"It isn't anything like that," Carter said with a nervous laugh. "I

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—I don't know what it is. It's hard to explain in so many words. It's really nothing. I'm just feeling nervous." He felt a fit of mild temper. "Calahan suggested maybe I'd better rest a couple of days, and thought maybe you'd give me something for my nerves. I'll be all right."

"Now wait a minute," Dr. Beaumont said soothingly. "I'm not being nosey." He smiled in a way to imply he was joking. "Sure some ghostly finger didn't stir *your* brains up a bit? You know it would depend on where it did the stirring. One part of the brain and you'd be dead. Another part and you'd get all confused in your thinking, maybe."

"I suppose you could tell?" Carter said, wishing the prying doctor would prescribe a sedative and get out.

"I forgot to tell you," Dr. Beaumont said, "that I took a brain specialist over to Kirkland in time to get some readings on Youngblood's brain before he died. The electroencephalograph was just outside in the hall when you were there. It showed pretty definite signs at the spot where the autopsy disclosed the cause of death. I'd like to have him bring his instrument up here, just for curiosity's sake."

"It's a good idea," Calahan said. "How do you know what's wrong?"

"All right," Carter said nervously. "Only for God's sake give me something before I lose control of my temper." He grinned mirthlessly.

Dr. Beaumont gave him a keen look and opened his black bag without saying a word. "Morphine," he commented, preparing the needle. When it was done he went to the phone. From his end of the conversation Carter gathered that the brain specialist would be coming over shortly with his encephalograph.

The doctor hung up and came back, drawing a chair up near Carter and lighting a cigaret. Calahan lurked in the background. Only Carter's long acquaintance with him made him able to discern the worry behind the blank expression.

The phone rang again. Calahan answered it. "Hi," he said. Carter watched him closely from the corners of his eyes. He saw Calahan lift his eyebrows in surprise and glance toward him. "Yeah," Calahan grunted, "but listen. I'll go downstairs and take it. Hang on."

"Who was it?" Carter demanded irritably. "I'm not an invalid. Take the call here."

Calahan came and stood in front of Carter, planting his feet apart. "Look, Herb," he said. "I don't like to say this, but you agreed to relax and let me handle things. I'm going to do it, and you're going to relax. It's nothing anyway. I transfered the call downstairs because it's going to be a long conversation and I don't want it to bother you. So cool off."

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He turned and stalked out of the room while Carter stared at him, not able to think of a comeback.

"You know," Dr. Beaumont said softly, "I like Calahan."

Carter snorted. Then his features relaxed in a smile.

Calahan returned fifteen minutes later, his face revealing nothing of his thoughts. Carter glared at him, then grinned ruefully.

Shortly after there was a knock. Calahan admitted a man in a light gray suit and two men who carried a bulky carton.

"This is Dr. Adlon," Dr. Beaumont introduced him. "It will only take a minute for him to do his stuff. I'm beginning to doubt he will find anything, but as long as he's here . . ."

Carter sat still while Dr. Adlon began working. He could see little of what was being done, so he kept his eyes on Calahan who was watching.

Dr. Adlon and Dr. Beaumont talked to each other, using polysyllabic Latin nouns that were meaningless to him. Finally they became interested in a spot above his left temple.

"It could be something significant," Dr. Beaumont finally deigned to say in plain English. "But even if it were, Dr. Adlon says that it couldn't do any damage. He's inlined to believe it's nothing. Anxiety often causes local disturbances of brain waves that have no physiological significance. So what we'll do is just prescribe rest and mild sedative for a couple of days and see what happens meanwhile."

"There's nothing even vaguely resembling what happened to those other two?" Calahan asked.

"Definitely not," Dr. Beaumont said.

* * *

DR. Beaumont had given another injection of morphine before leaving. Dr. Adlon's electroencephalograph was in one corner of the room, having been left there for another test in the morning.

Carter was beginning to feel drowsy. He watched Calahan nervously pacing the floor.

"Why don't you tell me what it is?" he finally asked. "I'm going to go to sleep before long anyway. It couldn't effect me."

Calahan shook his head. "Go to sleep, chief," he said. "It was just some long winded talk by the police that added up to them having accomplished nothing toward locating the Arbright kid."

Carter studied him a moment. "You're lying, Bugs," he said mildly. "But I'm too relaxed to do anything about it."

He closed his eyes, blotting out the room from consciousness. His thoughts became swirling dark masses that fled from the touch of probing thought. He wished he could

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have a dream in which Nicholas Archer explained things to him, and abruptly Archer's face appeared before him. But he shoved it away, knowing it was just a creation of his own thoughts. Not the real thing.

The real thing? What did that mean? Was there some way in which Julius Vandermeer alias Tom Orphen alias Nicholas Archer could actually be present in a dream? Consciously present and directing his own actions just as though it were reality?

A wall of blackness closed in pressing against him. He fought against it, clinging to the thought he was examining. Was a man in some mysterious way really able to enter another's dream, not as a figment of the dream, but as a consciously acting element of that dream? It wasn't possible . . . or was it? It didn't matter, anyway. It was just a thought.

But he had known that the image of Nicholas Archer in his mind had been just a memory image. Would he know if an image of the man were *real* if it appeared to him? He snorted half humorously. He didn't even know what he meant by real in that case.

The trouble with this whole thing, he decided, was that it was too big and too obscure. It was like being in a rowboat far out at sea in a dense fog and sensing the passage of a twenty thousand ton ship a few feet away, silent and ghostly, but too vast to alter its slow movement with the puny force of a single finger lifted to stop it.

Maybe that was why he was suddenly afraid. Or was he afraid? He examined his emotions. There was no fear that he could detect. There wasn't anything. That was the trouble. A man didn't get the urge to run, and tremble like a leaf over nothing. There had to be something.

What had the phone call to Calahan been? Had they found Arthur? Dead maybe? Had Bill uncovered the secret mailing list? What else could have happened that Calahan wouldn't want him to know about while he was sick?

Had Sprague and Pete brought those eight hundred kids into existence? It was an awful thing, really, when you thought about it. It had no purpose or it had some devilish purpose. It could only be done by fanatics. Fanatics. No one seemed to be a fanatic. But then, most fanatics were quite sensible on all except one subject . . . . Like the communists had been. Ralph Dexter . . .

So Sprague was going to experiment with the children, try to make them into ordinary children again. It didn't make sense. Why would he do that after going to all the trouble of making them the way they were? It had to be Sprague, of course.

It had to be Sprague. Father Sprague the ex-priest.

The wall of darkness drifted slowly, close enough so that he could have reached out and touched it.

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Drifting slowly, silent in the silence . . . dark in the darkness . . .

He struggled upward. There was light. He reached for it. Then he opened his eyes and blinked against the pain of bright light in his eyes.

Calahan jumped up and closed the venetian blinds. "Sorry, chief," he said. "I didn't realize the sun was shining directly on you." He came over and stood above Carter, studying him concernedly. "How do you feel?"

"All right now," Carter said.

He sat up and looked around. He was in bed in his pajamas. He looked over at the window, remembering directions. He realized suddenly that it was late morning.

* * *

IT wasn't until after Carter finished the breakfast that was brought up for him that Calahan said, "You do seem to be okay now."

"I am," Carter said. "I'm pretty sure I know what it was that was bothering me. I figured it out while I was asleep. By the way, what was that phone call about?"

Calahan hesitated. "What was it that was bothering you, Herb? Mind telling me?"

"I think I'll keep it to myself for the present," Carter said. "You'll find out soon enough." He smiled. "Where's my cigars?"

Calahan went to the closet and brought his cigar case and lighter. He held the lighter to the cigar, his eyes studying Carter. "Was my guess right? That somewhere in your mind things had clicked into place, and you knew who was behind the children?"

Carter inhaled deeply and let the smoke drift out of his lungs. He shrugged without answering. Studying the end of his cigar he repeated, "What was that phone call last night about?"

"It was Bill," Calahan said. "He found the list. He's on his way here. I told him to see me when he got here, that you were ill."

"That's over," Carter said, getting up. "At long last we're going to have something to sink our teeth in on this business."

Calahan was shaking his head slowly. "I wouldn't be too sure," he said. "Bill was supposed to be here by now."

"Nothing had better happen to him," Carter said ominously, "or I'll take Sprague apart with my own bare hands."

"So you think it was Sprague?" Calahan said. "I thought so."

"What did Bill say over the phone?"

"He said he found a false panel in the back of a clothes closet. He would never have found it, but he went over the place time after time and finally figured that if there was anything there any place it would have to be at that spot. He went to Flagstaff and brought back a

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concrete drill and went to work. He never did find the place to open the six inch thick concrete door. He tore it out with the drill until he had a hole large enough to get in."

"God!" Carter said. "If anything's happened to him . . . Where did he call from? There or Flagstaff?"

"Flagstaff. He was going to drive right on through."

"Had he looked at any of the names? Were the foster parents of any of the children on the list?"

"I don't know," Calahan said. "All I know is that he thought he had something, and that he would drive right on through. He's only—"

The phone interrupted him. He leaped to answer it, then turned to Carter with a relieved grunt. "It's Bill." Then into the phone, "Come on up. The chief's okay now."

* * *

"GOT it," Bill Nichols said when he came in. "It's more than a list. It's a complete record of the whole thing." He held up a thick ledger book, then handed it to Carter.

"The whole thing?" Carter echoed, unwilling to accept the idea of having reached his goal.

"The whole thing," Bill said. "I haven't read it all. Just some. The reason I'm late is that I stopped several times and had coffee and a sandwich and read some more."

Carter stared at the book, wanting to yet unwilling to open it.

"Doris and Pete weren't in on it were they?" he asked.

"Yes, they were in on it too. Go ahead and read it. I need some sleep. I've been driving all night."

"You don't seem unhappy about it," Carter said, puzzled.

"I don't know whether I am or not," Bill said. "I'm full of benzedrene and haven't slept for over twenty-four hours. I checked in before I came up. Now that you've got the book I'll go on to my room. Just around the corner in 507. Wake me up if you want me."

He grinned happily and went to the door. With a jaunty parting wave he ducked out.

"He does have a jag on," Calahan said. "He must have worked all day yesterday getting through that concrete, then when he found this he must have come right on without rest."

Carter was idly turning the pages of the ledger. "Notice anything about it?" he said.

"The pages look stiff," Calahan said. "Coated with something."

Carter stopped at one of the pages. "Coated after the wiring. The only thing it could be is a preservative. They have them now that will coat a newspaper with a fine film and keep it from deteriorating for centuries, they claim. Hmm. He said he never did find out how to get that slab open? Maybe it wasn't

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supposed to be opened. A sort of time capsule affair, preserving this record for future generations.

"Let's see what it has to say," Calahan said impatiently. "God! The answer to everything, and you pause while you study the composition of hte paper it's written on!"

Carter handed the ledger to Calahan. "You read it," he said. "I'm going down to the coffee shop and have breakfast. When I come back you can tell me what's in it."

He went down to the lobby and bought the morning paper. In the coffee shop off the lobby he ordered ham and eggs and sat back to read the news.

The waitress had just brought his ham and eggs when Calahan slipped into the seat beside him, giving him a look of appreciation. "You're smarter than I thought, chief," he said quietly. Then, to the waitress, "Coffee and toast."

"What was in it?" Carter said.

"It sounded like one of the books of the Bible. I didn't read much. After the first half dozen pages you've got the whole idea. It starts out with a lecture on good and evil and drifts into something about one sided coins that I didn't get the drift of. After a couple of pages it begins to make sense again. At least it gives a sensible reason for so many of the kids. The gist of that is that it would be impossible to predict in a given instance whether any particular one of them would turn out good or bad, but with enough of them the good ones would be able to control the bad ones. That was necessary because nobody else could possibly handle them when they get full grown."

Carter nodded without interrupting his chewing.

"Then, so help me," Calahan went on, "it just lists each of the children with the names of its foster parents. 'The child, whatever its name was, was accepted into the household of whatever the foster parents' names were.' I skipped through that and tried to find a section that was down-to-earth. No listing of the original parents, no description of the method used to change normal children. No mention of Sprague or Pete or Doris."

Carter smiled. "I noticed that myself. That's why I didn't read any further. I'll bet you missed the only vital thing that book gives us."

"What?" Calahan asked. "It doesn't give us anything we didn't know or suspect. We were pretty sure Sprague had to be behind those children. It's obvious now. It gives the list of them. We had that anyway."

"How many does it list?" Carter asked.

"All eight hundred, I guess," Calahan said.

Carter shook his head. "Go up and count them. There are at least a thousand. I suspected that from the start."

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"What!" Calahan exclaimed.

"You see," Carter explained. "Arthur Arbright wasn't one of those reported and legally adopted. Mrs. Arbright wanted to keep him too much to risk losing him. It was fairly certain there would be others like her. Leave half a dozen babies on doorsteps and the chances are that none of them will be reported to the police. Leave a thousand and it's a certainty that a fairly large number will be reported. And we decided some time ago that the object in leaving them in that particular way was to tag them so that when attention was drawn to them it would be easy to find them. What we didn't realize was that there was a dual purpose. It was desired that some of them be brought together into something like the Mentalphysics Foundation, while another sizeable bunch of them grow up under normal surroundings, or like Topsy."

"Well," Calahan said, "we have the complete list then. We also have all the proof we need in this book that Sprague was behind it."

"Except for one thing," Carter said, biting into a piece of toast. "Neither Sprague or Pete or Doris wrote it. Look at the handwriting again."

Calahan's eyes widened. "That's what was bothering me when I read it. I remember now I saw the handwriting of each of them in those letters Bill showed us." He frowned. "But that doesn't mean too much. It was found at their place below Flagstaff."

"Was it?" Carter said quietly. "Look at it from the standpoint of the court. We have only Bill's unsupported word that he found it there, after an illegal search and tearing through a concrete wall just because he had come to the conclusion after five days of searching that that was the only place there could be anything. Why not the floors? Why not out in the hills under some rocks? We know how Bill works. We might have gotten the same hunch he did. But how would it sound in court?"

"Okay," Calahan said. "We still have all those extra names though, and can round up those other children to prove our case."

"Let's not be hasty," Carter said. "I have a hunch we're going to get to the bottom of things before long now. In fact, I think I have the right answers already. I want to be sure though. This afternoon we'll wake Bill up, and we'll drive down to Utah and have a showdown with Sprague and Pete."

* * *

SPRAGUE smiled at the three grim faces confronting him in the open door. "Come in," he said. "We've been expecting you ever since Doris told us she had let the cat out of the bag and you jumped out of camp like the devil was

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after you. Or better yet, let's all go over to Pete and Doris's apartment. They're there."

He turned out the light and stepped into the hall. The three F.B.I. men followed him out of the building and down the blacktop street to another building.

"Come in!" Doris's cheery voice called when Sprague knocked. He opened the door and they went in.

"Bill!" Doris shrieked. "And Bugsy." She became serious. "The showdown, Herb?"

Pete came into the room from the kitchen. He was smiling, but his face was pale. "Hi, Bill," he said to Nichols.

"You three are in a spot," Carter said. "I think you know it places me in a spot too. If I have to bring things out into the open I'm going to have to resign and face the medicine too for holding back on Pete when he was—"

"Don't say it," Doris said quietly.

"I should be sore," Bill said. "All these years I've been putting on the drinking brother act while you three laughed at me behind my back."

"But what could we do?" Doris said. "We knew it was only fair that you be permitted to keep an eye on Pete to make sure he stayed in the straight and narrow."

"Or," Bill said, "keep us lulled while the three of you accomplished the most gigantic crime of all history right under our noses."

"But we didn't," Doris said. "You've got to believe me. We had nothing to do with those children. We didn't even know about them until Ashbrook and Luntz were down, and Luntz told me about Arthur Arbright."

"It's no use, Doris," Sprague said. "They'll never believe us. We are the only people in the world that have anything that could conceivably change normal children into children able to perform miracles. I don't blame them for thinking so."

"We haven't made that accusation *yet*," Carter said.

"But you will," Sprague said.

"Maybe not," Carter said. "Let's get a few things cleared up before we go off half cocked. Pete, I want to know how you got mixed up with Ralph Dexter, and I want to know everything you know about him. I want the whole truth. Every bit of it."

Pete licked his dry lips. "All right," he said almost inaudibly. "I suppose I was a typical case. I got interested in Communism and read a lot of books about it. I wasn't old enough to realize that there's a world of difference between theory and practice. In theory Communism is supposed to take the backward masses and lift them to the level of civilization and education where they are capable of governing themselves, then step out of the picture and let them govern themselves. I hadn't realized yet that in practice

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a dictatorship will never permit that to come about. Can't. Anyway, when I got my chance to work on government research I was approached. I looked on myself as a citizen of the world, not just one country. It didn't seem a treasonous act to take the secrets of an already obsolete archaic government and let them be used to bring about the state of world civilization. And after I had done it once I was stuck. When events began to open my eyes I saw no way out except to kill the one man who knew about me. Doris tells me you know the rest."

"Who was Ralph Dexter?" Carter said. "That's the one thing we don't know."

Pete looked at Doris. He turned back to Carter. "I don't know," he said.

"I think you're lying," Carter said. "We'll skip that for the moment though. Now I'm going to sketch a picture. It's a picture of a young man who had dreams of changing the world, ushering in the new dispensation, so to speak. He wasn't above treason to accomplish it once, and that soured only because he discovered the leaders of that revolution weren't the altruists he had naively believed them to be. Also in the picture is another young man who had devoted his life to a dream. A dream of service to mankind. A dream of lifting man to the high state of godhead where he knows he has a soul, and has attained the powers that only rare figure in history had before. He too wa not above treason, in a way. He de cided that he was right and th powers that be were wrong. He to foreswore his allegiance to those tha governed his destiny. The patter in both cases was similar. The drear in basic essentials was the sam The bringing about of the ide world. Together they went ahea on it. There was a girl in love wit one of them. Her love clouded he judgment and she believed eventu ally as they believed."

"I like that," Doris snorted.

"Believe me," Sprague said wit a smile, "it was she who crystalize our aims. She was far from the vic tim of a female whim."

"So," Carter said a little loudl to drown opposition. "These tw dreamers experimented. And one da they made a discovery that coul enable them to bring about th world of the future they had drean ed about. They had the instrumen and the know-how. They built u an organization of carefully selecte people with the proper degree fanaticism, and somehow the gran strategy developed."

"This is fascinating," Doris sai "Go on, Herb."

"The grand strategy was base on a mixture of psychology and sta istics. It eliminated what wasn wanted, and ensured what was wan ed. Just one of the children coul have been brought into existen

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with the machines these two dreamers had perfected. But that would have practically ensured the creation of a new religion as he walked through life changing water to wine and healing the sick and raising the dead. A hundred could have been created, but the problem would develop in somewhat the same way, with a hundred religions springing up. And one of these two dreamers realized that such an outcome would be eventually somewhat less than worthless. A century from now, ten centuries from now, the original facts would become distorted to fit changing events.

"They could publish their findings. Science could be shown how to make supermen and women at will. That too had its defects. Immediate objections against making all mankind into supermen would be advanced. The secret would be preserved by the government. Maybe those in power would use it themselves and keep all others from using it. A new form of dictatorship would be made possible.

"So they finally hit upon a scheme to bring about what they wanted. It was utterly mad, but also utterly perfect. Its logic was so unanswerable that they had no trouble in getting plenty of people to help them carry it out. It was sure to succeed."

"Absolutely wonderful," Doris murmured, while the others, including Calahan and Bill Nichols listened spellbound.

"It was so perfect that no matter what happened it would come out the same way. The variables of public and official reaction were accounted for so that they couldn't alter the outcome. Even initial probabilities were probably accounted for.

The first step was to get a large number of couples to try to have babies within a certain period, limited to a week or ten days. Maybe only half or less would succeed, but the more the better. When that was accomplished the parents let the child be placed under the instrument that would unlock—or perhaps create for all I know—the inherent power in the brain of the as yet unformed mind of the baby to manipulate matter by direct thought.

"The babies were then abandoned on carefully selected doorsteps. Not because the real parents didn't want to raise them, but in order to present the world with a mystery that would command notice."

Doris's laugh was nervously amused. "You almost convince me we are guilty," she said.

"Maybe it was hoped that they would be brought together into something like the Mentalphysics Foundation at once," Carter went on doggedly. "But it didn't really matter. And of course not all of those chidren left on doorsteps were reported. Eight hundred, in round numbers, were. How many hundreds

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weren't, but were kept and raised by those who found them on their doorsteps, could never be found out without a complete list of the identities of all the people on whose doorsteps they were left."

"You mean there may be more than those we have here?" Sprague said, every inflection of his voice showing startled surprise.

"Now all that was necessary was to wait," Carter said, ignoring Sprague's remark. "Sooner or later one of the children would do something that would command attention. It remained for poor little Arthur Arbright to believe naively that birds could grow from bird-seed, and for the late and unfortunate Dr. Fletcher to get interested in the person who could make bird-seed grow into birds. But if it hadn't been Arthur it would have been some other of the children. The end result was inevitable. Tragedy brought the children to the government's attention. The Mentalphyics Foundation was formed. In one bold swoop the world is presented with at least eight hundred superboys and supergirls to raise. And very conveniently there happen to be two scientists who have spent twenty-eight years of research to prepare them to find out how normal children can become literally gods and goddesses. These two scientists very conveniently offer their services to the Foundation, and in due time 'discover' the method used. From there on the millenium could usher itself in without opposition.

"The beauty of the plan was that there would always be those other hundreds unaccounted for. Some of them would inevitably reach maturity and force things, even if a way were discovered to turn the kids back into normal children again and it was done. *Everything* was accounted for from the beginning."

"Beautiful," Doris murmured. "Beautiful. Don't you just love a man who can figure out a thing like that?"

Carter glared at her, then grinned. "There it is," he said. "How are you going to get around it?"

"Is there any need to?" Sprague said. "You yourself said everything was taken into account. That would also include the exposure of the, ah, criminals."

"Everything was taken into account except one thing," Carter said. "The, ah, criminals didn't think that the complete list of the children would ever be found. We found it. That means things are different now. Every one of those children can be rounded up. Capable scientists can take over and learn how to operate those machines and change them all back into normal children. Then the whole thing can be destroyed and forgotten."

"You found a complete list of all the children?" Sprague said. "Where?"

"At your place below Flagstaff,"

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Bill Nichols said. "I spent five days there searching until I found it."

This *is* interesting," Sprague said, while Doris and Pete stared at Bill in wide eyed surprise.

* * *

"WHERE did you find it?" Pete said, breaking his silence.

"You know where Sprague's room goes against the bank?" Bill said. "His clothes closet is right against the concrete wall there. I went to Flagstaff and got a cement drill and spent the better part of a day breaking through. I found a sort of vault space. The ledger book that contained the list was there in a sealed steel box."

"Why there was no space back of that wall," Doris said. "I know because we had the place built ourselves."

"Was there some sort of secret door to it?" Sprague asked.

"There must have been," Bill said. "I didn't find it, but it's a cinch that book didn't get there without one. I remember that that part of the house was built shortly after you all moved there, twenty-five years or more ago."

"There is one thing," Carter said. "The handwriting in the book doesn't belong to you three. At least if it does it's disguised. A handwriting expert could tell, but offhand I'd say that neither of you three did the writing in it."

"But how'd it get there?" Doris said. "I'd swear there's no space back there for such a thing as Bill describes." She studied Carter through narrowed eyes. "Somehow I can't believe you'd frame evidence to make a case, Herb."

"Let's see that book," Sprague said.

"Go out and get it, Calahan," Carter said.

Calahan left. Silence settled in the room. Carter took out a cigar and bit off the end. He lit it and blew smoke thoughtfully in Pete's direction. "Sure you don't know who Ralph Dexter was?" he said.

"N-no," Pete said uncomfortably.

Carter's searching eyes turned to Doris who bit her lip and turned away, then to Sprague who stared back impassively.

Calahan's footsteps sounded in the hall. He came in with the thick ledger and gave it to Carter.

"Ever see this before?" Carter asked.

Three heads shook slowly.

"Look at the handwriting," Carter said, opening it at random and holding it out so they could look at it. "Recognize it?" He watched their blank expressions as they studied it. "Let's assume you know nothing about it, just for the sake of argument. Why would it be where it was?"

"Hmm," Sprague said, touching the paper gently with a finger. "It seems to have a preservative on it.

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I'm beginning to see something. I may be entirely wrong, of course, but I see a glimmer of sense."

"All right," Carter said. "Tell us about it."

"You may think it conceit," Sprague said. "We were building for the future when we built that place. If we succeeded in our search for the soul it might become a shrine. We built it to last for centuries. This could have been placed there so that in some future century when man's curiosity made him excavate the crumbling ruins it would be discovered. I can't see why it would be placed there, but that would explain the motive, perhaps."

"And you don't recognize the handwriting, any of you?" Carter asked, chewing on his cigar.

They shook their heads slowly, not saying anything.

"And you still won't tell me who Ralph Dexter is?" Carter said, turning sharp eyes in Pete's direction.

Pete's fingers were trembling. A muscle in his cheek twitched. "I don't know who he was," he said.

"There's one thing I've always wondered, chief," Calahan said. "Why are you so worked up about Ralph Dexter? What could he have to do with this present mess?"

Carter grinned. "It's significant that neither Pete nor Sprague nor Doris thought to ask that question," he said. "Look at them. They know who Ralph Dexter is. They know whose handwriting is in this book. They know who put it where Bill found it, though I don't think they knew it was there."

"Let's not go to absurd lengths," Sprague said coldly. "And while we're at it, maybe we should clear up something about these other charges. The theory you so ably portrayed concerning the bringing of the children into the world may be quite correct so far as it goes. That is, the motivations and actual happenings may be as you described. Certainly I can think of no better explanation, but get this straight. We three had absolutely nothing to do with it. We're telling the truth when we say that the first we ever heard of the children was when Alfred Luntz told Doris while Ashbrook was out in the lab with Pete and me."

"And I suppose it was the first time you'd ever seen Ashbrook," Calahan murmured.

"Yes," Sprague said. He laughed shortly. "Don't tell me you're trying to make that poor man one of the culprits too!"

"Don't tell me you don't know—" Calahan began.

"Shut up, Calahan," Carter growled. He turned his attention back to Sprague. Puffing on his cigar contentedly he stared at the man for several seconds. Finally he said, "What would you say if I told you I know who Ralph Dexter is, and also know whose handwriting is in this book?"

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THE silence in the room for a moment was absolute. It was broken by an explosive "Pfah!" from Sprague. "You're clutching at straws, and very crudely. I've heard so many wonderful things from Doris about you that frankly I'm disappointed in you. You're a pig headed fool who never lets go of an idea no matter how many years may pass. And now you try melodramatics, pretending to already know something you fancy we know, in order to try to trap us into some imagined damning slip. I'm fed up. If you think you have enough of a case against us to ruin our lives by dragging us through the courts go ahead and do your worst. Arrest us."

Carter blinked at him, and when he had finished talking let his mouth relax into a grin. "I'll probably have to do just that," he said. "I hate to do it without a confession though. A confession isn't necessary, because I can bring enough proof together to convince a jury. But a confession would help."

"All ri—" Sprague clamped his lips together and drew in a deep breath. "Go ahead and make your arrest. I won't help you by confessing anything."

"Then Doris and Pete are in it too," Carter said.

"They had nothing to do with it," Sprague said. "I'll sign that much of a confession."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Doris said. "We stick together. Don't we darling?" she added, turning to Pete.

"We're in it together," Pete said. "And I'm willing to confess and get the whole thing settled. I guess I owe something anyway, since I would have been brought to trial for treason if it weren't for Doris."

"And me," Carter said. "Don't forget that I was the one who didn't order your arrest. Doris just talked me into letting you go."

"And you," Pete said with a weak smile. "Thanks."

Carter grinned at Calahan and Bill. "Twenty-eight years after I save him he thanks me," he said sadly. His eyes snapped back to Pete. "All right, write out your confession now and sign it. Get a pen and paper."

His face bloodless, Pete went to a drawer and brought out pen and paper, then sat down at the table. Looking up at Carter with grimly compressed lips he said, "What do you want me to write?"

"I'll dictate it," Carter said. "If you object to any part you can argue about it before writing it down. Ready?"

Pete nodded. Carter looked at Doris who was nervously chewing a fingernail and trying to look calm, and at Sprague who was looking at his hands gripping his knees with the intentness of an entomologist studying a strange insect.

"Okay," Carter said. He took his cigar out of his mouth and appear-

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ed to ponder the smoldering fire at its charred end. "I, Peter Hart alias Peter Glass, do herebye confess . . ." He paused while Pete wrote, the pen scraping noisily. ". . . that during the years 1948, 1949, and 1950, I did turn secret information that was the property of the Government of the United States . . ." He smiled at the grim straightness of Pete's lips as he wrote. ". . . over to a man whom I had good reason to believe would give it to the U.S.S.R. period." He stuck the cigar back in his mouth and gazed dreamily at the ceiling until Pete's fingers came to rest on the paper. "The name this man went under was Ralph Dexter comma . . ." He fixed his eyes on the pen in Pete's hands. ". . . but I had known him previously under the name of Tom Orphen—" He saw the pen dig abruptly into the paper. He was aware of Sprague leaping to his feet, of Doris jerking her hand to her mouth and gasping. But he kept his eyes on Pete and the pen.

An almost visible flow of will into the hand relaxed Pete's fingers. He turned slowly and looked at Carter. "What name did you say?" he asked. "I'm sure I never heard it before." His eyes were two bright coals of fear.

"Orphen?" Calahan and Nichols exclaimed almost together. Then Calahan said, "But that's impossible! I can conceive of anything but that."

"Then look at Pete and change your mind," Carter said. "It's true."

Pete was shaking his head slowly and trying to utter words which wouldn't come.

"You're making a mistake, Herb," Doris said. "You don't know what you're doing."

"I don't?" Carter turned his eyes toward her for a moment, his lips pulled back against his teeth in a wolfish grin.

"No." Doris leaned forward, speaking rapidly, brushing aside Sprague's attempt to stop her. "He wasn't a spy. Not in the ordinary sense of the word. He was working for Russia's downfall just as any loyal American would." She caught herself and stopped, clamping her teeth on her lip.

"Tell me more," Carter said.

"I think this has gone far enough," Sprague said, his voice heavy and deliberate.

Carter jerked his head in Sprague's direction. Doris had sprung up and rushed to him screaming, "No, Sprague! For God's sake no!"

Beads of perspiration crept out onto Carter's forehead as he watched. The grim purposefulness in the ex-priest's features slowly relaxed. He brushed the back of his hand over his eyes and shook his head as though awaking from a dream. "Perhaps you're right, my dear."

"Of course she's right," Carter said softly. "If I were found with my brains addled by a fingerhole in them, and Calahan and Bill were

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found the same way, the government would probably drop an atom bomb on this whole mess to get rid of it."

* * *

HE watched in silence as Sprague turned away and sat down.

"It had to be Nicholas Archer," he went on in a quiet voice while the others listened passively from sheer emotional exhaustion. "It was a combination of what would be called a true dream and a true vision the way I considered it. Nicholas Archer, the man invisible to everyone except Pete. Ralph Dexter, the object of murder. Two sides of the same coin. You had forgotten Tom Orphen, your old schoolteacher, hadn't you? You didn't remember who he was in the dream, but you gave him a name that was a symbolic identification of him. And you didn't know that under the layers of disguise of the man Ralph Dexter lay your old teacher who knew all about you and how to handle you. But your subconscious stripped Doris's disguise away from her in the dream, and it stripped Dexter's disguise away from him."

Pete was shaking his head with slow monotony, his mouth open as though paralyzed in that position.

"You figured all that just from that dream?" Calahan asked incredulously.

"Just as a possibility," Carter said. "Then when he so adroitly managed to keep us from snitching his fingerprints in Evanston that pointed to him knowing we had a set of his prints from that room where he was known as Ralph Dexter. But even that was just speculation. You've seen the handwriting in that ledger. It's a very distinctive style. Unique in a way. Orphen is from the age when penmanship was considered an art. I saw that same handwriting in a rooming house in Seattle where he wrote his forwarding address when he moved to Evanston."

"Good God!" Bill Nichols exclaimed. "Don't tell me he's responsible for this too!"

"I was sure of that before you found the ledger, Bill. I always thought he had something to do with it in some way, but it wasn't until I was here day before yesterday that it all clicked somewhere in my own subconscious." He smiled at Calahan. "It nearly gave me a nervous breakdown before it came to the surface, but it finally did. And we had all we needed to know right before us all the time. Only we didn't know it. It wasn't until I realized that Sprague has the same powers that these youngsters have. And that meant that *his machines didn't need to work!*" He took his cigar out of his mouth and scraped the ash off, then put it back in his mouth and took out his lighter, puffing the coal back to life. "The machines are just a front. I had to realize that to get at the core of the whole thing. Tom

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Orphen had that power. I should have guessed it when I met him. There's a certain air of megalomania about him, a consciousness of invincibleness. It's quite conceivable that what Doris was trying to tell us a few minutes ago is true, that he helped Russia rise to power so that she would raise her ignorant peasants to a high level of civilization, and then collapse as a world threat while that civilized level persisted as it has done.

"I'm convinced he's never consciously lied to me. It would be beneath him. If that's true, then his own origin is unknown to him. He was tossed from one family to another until he wasn't even sure he was distantly related to anyone who had kept him for any length of time. He discovered his power over matter and carefully kept it a secret.

"I should have suspected the truth about the children when I first heard that poor Arthur had made birdseed grow into birds. Since I didn't I should certainly have suspected the truth when it was thrown right into my face by Arthur killing Fletcher and Youngblood. *The power that could kill by thought could give another person that same power.* Everything I said about how and why the children came into the world is true except that they were changed by Archer. Tom Orphen. They are his children."

"What are you going to do?" Doris's voice came in a whisper.

"I don't know," Carter said. "I don't know. Maybe nothing. I don't see how anything could stop what's been started. I keep remembering what Tom Orphen said about a small town cop picking him up on the street and taking him home for a good meal before hauling him off to the poorfarm, and the cop's wife keeping him and seeing that he went to college when he grew up. How many people did little Tom kill before that? How close did that policeman come to getting killed? Probably as close as I did a minute ago." He smiled ruefully at Sprague. "Then I think of Arthur Arbright, somewhere in Idaho or Montana, sooner or later being adopted by some motherly female and growing up to start the whole thing all over again—if by some chance I could persuade the government to drop an atom bomb on the Mentalphysics Foundation and take this ledger and systematically destroy all of Tom Orphen's other children that can be located."

He got to his feet and ground out his cigar in the ashtray.

"I don't know what I will do eventually," he said. "Right now I think I'll get a good night's sleep. Then tomorrow I—" He went to the door and opened it, and turned to face them. "— may go to Evanston and have a talk with—" He hesitated. "I guess Julius Vandermeer is as good a name as any."

THE END

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FINAL APPRAISAL

By Mack Reynolds

THE assignment was a matter of talk, talk, talk, and talk, talk, talk. But that was Rand's strong point and he kept talking. He himself was thoroughly sold on the idea and that makes a difference; he *knew* how much depended upon him.

He cut red tape cleverly, expertly, rapidly; until he reached the offices of Harri Kristn, the CyberSup-Com's right hand man. Kurt Rand spent a week in the anteroom of Kristn, charm, glibness, intensity and enterprise availing him nothing.

At least he was in New Washington and able to spend his nights at home. He and Nadine were infinitely fortunate, they had a mini-apt all to themselves. But, mini-apt or not, the nights were monotonously the same—although they thought of them as *deliciously* the same.

He'd come home, stand before the door and let the vizi-lock check him, enter the decontamination chamber and strip himself of clothes and helmet, stand patiently for the full five minutes, and finally enter.

It was a trifle larger than a medium sized trailer of the middle 20th Century. Everything was efficiently compact; the couch-bed, the bar-chair, the refresher, the folding servo-table, the televiz, and this-and-that the other things. So compact, so efficient, so complete—they knew nothing else, so they didn't realize—so cold.

But they were unbelievably fortunate; they had a mini-apt all of their own. There were a good many Space Commanders, a good many bird Colonels, that didn't have these comforts. Kurt Rand didn't deceive himself, it wasn't his influence that had managed to swing it, nor even the combined influence of he and Nadine. It was her's alone.

At night, he got there a half hour before her. From the decontaminator he'd go directly to the closet and bring out his terry cloth robe; two steps would take him to the refresher. He spent about ten minutes there, then came out and pulled the robe around his lanky form.

Habit made him shoot a quick glance at the chronom then, but it was only habit; the time was invariably 18:33. Only once or twice had he been more than half a minute off. Kurt Rand had this down pat.

He'd let the servo-table up and spend exactly three minutes in picking their menu for the night's meal. Nadine hated to have to choose her

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Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

The answer was so simple they wondered why no-one had hit upon it before. Then PropCorps made its suggestion and the fate of three planets rested on the white strip of paper in the MasterCyber.

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own dishes. It was the one unreasoning femininity she allowed herself—that is, except for Kurt.

He'd choose both their dishes, press the appropriate buttons, then go to the bar chair and dial for Side-Cars. By that time he could hear the hum of the decontaminator. Nadine would hurry into the room, bird-like in her quick movements, without a glance at him, and dash to the refresher. While she was inside, he would get her robe and stand waiting at the door, eyeing with deep concentration the chronom.

She popped out at 18:51 and would slip her lithe form into the robe he held, but his mock scowl would remain on his face.

She would say, worriedly, "What time is it, darling?"

And he would answer, "You're three seconds late," or, "You're four seconds early," whatever it might be, and then would add, "You've much too early for dinner," or, "Dinner will be ruined."

Then they'd laugh and take the few steps to the servo-table arm in arm. It was the one light moment of the day allowed them; they'd made a ceremony of it.

Whatever he'd picked for her dinner was satisfactory. He should know, almost ten years of companionship had taught them to be thoroughly familiar with each other's wants, weaknesses, desires.

. . . If only things were such that a normal life could be theirs. But they never mentioned this. They had been born in war, their parents had been born in war, and their grandparents, and great-grandparents . . . And who, any longer, could tell what had had been the original cause, the original spark that had lit the fuse, that had sterilized man's progress for a quarter of a millenium? Lost in history was the reason for it all, a history whose records were continually being changed by each generation to fit current needs, current propaganda.

ON the eighth day, Kurt Rand's name was called by the middle-aged WASC who presided at the portals leading to Harri Kristn's office and to the CyberChief beyond. She said wearily, "Lieutenant Kurt Rand."

He arose, slipped his pok-mag in a pocket and approached her desk.

Without looking up, she scanned her notes and said, "Mr. Kristn will be able to give you three minutes. If you are able to convince him of the importance of your project, he will let me know and I will contact you through PropCorps for a more lengthy interview."

His mind whirled. *Three minutes! He couldn't possibly* . . . He felt the old tic in his eye begin its clamor. *Three minutes!*

The door opened before him and he marched through woodenly.

This was it. This was the oppor-

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tunity for which PropCorps—the least understood, the despised of all the service arms—had waited, had worked, for so long. This was why he, Kurt Rand, had been chosen to sell it. They had told him he had the silver tongue, the gift of gab, the old phoney-baloney, as an earlier age had put it. Good old Kurt could convince them.

His eye ticked uncontrollably now. Three minutes was nothing.

Harri Kristn's face held the sallow paleness known to everyone equipped with a televiz set, or able to secure the newspapers issued by the PropCorps, or the pamphlets, or the PropCorps slanted novels. He didn't look like the unbelievably capable right hand man of the all-powerful CyberSupCom. He appeared a weary, ill man; and he was.

He didn't look up. He read from a sheet of paper before him. "Lieutenant Rand, Propaganda Corps. You have three minutes."

Kurt didn't salute. He took a deep breath and snapped, "Sir, I have been kept waiting for a full week in your outer office while the most important project ever hit upon by the PropCorps has languished. I *must* have the opportunity to speak to the CyberSupCom."

Harri Kristn looked up at him now, only mild interest in his colorless eyes. He said quietly, "I'm not distressed by your wait, Lieutenant; tell me, what could the PropCorps possibly hit upon which would be worth my time, not to speak of the CyberChief's?"

Kurt snapped, "An absolutely certain method of winning the war, sir." He spun on his heel and marched stiffly from the room.

The tired WASC at the desk looked up in surprise as he stalked by. "You used only one minute of your time," she said.

He didn't answer. He was in a hurry to get out of the building, before being called back. He wanted to give Kristn time to stew about it.

It wouldn't do to go back to the PropCorps offices now; and it wouldn't do to go home. Kristn would be able to locate him too easily.

He went to a sub-officer's bar; got himself a corner table and ordered a *woji*-flip. He would have preferred a Side-Car but he was quite sure the liquor here would be synthetic. Anything but *woji* would, at least. Not everybody could stand the fiery Martian drink so a good supply was more or less always on hand.

Ten minutes later, the Inter-Sectional Communicator speaker, above the bar, said, "Now hear this. Lieutenant Kurt Rand, ProCorps. Contact the office of Mr. Kristn immediately.

He sat tight and ordered another *woji*-flip.

The message was repeated after another ten minutes, more emphatically.

Fifteen minutes and two *wojis*

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later, a small detachment of SFPs came in the door and looked around. They approached the half dozen officers present one at a time, finally getting to Kurt.

The non-com in command of the squad saluted and said, "Sir, may I see your identification?"

Kurt handed it over. The sergeant flipped a quick look at the name and said, "Sir, you'll have to come with us. Mr. Kristn's orders." As an afterthought, he added, "Didn't you hear the call go over the communicator?"

Kurt said, "No," and reached for his helmet. He hadn't expected it this quickly. In fact, he was somewhat irritated, he'd wanted Kristn to stew for at least a couple of hours. "All right," he said, "let's go." The non-com marched ahead and his men followed along behind Rand. He wondered what kind of orders they had. The possibility seemed remote that he'd be disciplined because of the way he'd acted in Kristn's office, but you never knew. He could feel the tic in his eye again.

HIS escort left him at the desk of the WASC.

She said, "Mr. Kristn will see you immediately, Lieutenant."

He entered the sanctum again, marched up to the desk and came to attention, his face expressionless. This time Harri Kristn watched his progress across the room and nodded to him infinitesimally.

Kristn said quietly, "I assume your theatrical tactics are an indication that the PropCorps has come upon something they consider so important that it feels anything goes in order to achieve the ear of the CyberSupCom."

Kurt remained stiffly at attention, keeping his face impassive. He said, "Sir, the PropCorps has discovered a method of ending the war in a matter, probably, of months. It seems unbelievable that it is this difficult to reach the ear of the authorities necessary to put the plan into action."

Harri Kristn sighed deeply. "Lieutenant, in the past two centuries tens of thousands of persons have devised a method of ending the war in months. I myself, in the decade or so I have held this position, have had thousands approach me with this, that, or the other scheme." He toyed with a memo pad, reflectively. "Most never even actually get as far as this office, Lieutenant; practically none get past me to see the CyberChief. Those that have, somehow failed to end the war in a period of months."

Kurt remained silent, at attention, his eyes straight before him.

Harri Kristn said, "Tell me about it."

"No, sir."

The heavy eyebrows of the sick man went up. He showed no anger but there was surprise. "Why?" he

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asked. "How can you expect to get past my desk unless . . ."

Eyes still straight before him, Kurt Rand said, "Only three persons are aware of this project, sir. I won't even mention the names of the other two. Its success depends largely upon no one, not just the enemy, but *no one,* learning of it until the moment to strike."

Harri Kristn leaned back in his chair and regarded the other for a full thirty seconds. He said, as though to himself, "Obviously, you are not a crackpot, nor, I suppose, are the commanding officers of the PropCorps who sent you here." He sighed deeply, then, "The CyberSupCom isn't particularly partial to the Corps you represent, Lieutenant."

The statement called for no answer. Kurt Rand knew it was true; he didn't say anything.

Harri Kristn shifted in his chair. He took a small box from the top drawer of his desk and brought a pill from it. Pouring a glass of water from a desk carafe, he took the pill expressionlessly.

"I assume your project involves the use of the MasterCyber."

"Of course it does," Kristn went on reasonably, "or you wouldn't be here. Your own corps has the use of minor cybernetics machines, although I would imagine there is little use for them in propaganda."

Neither of them spoke for a moment. Finally Kristn sighed deeply again. "Very well, Lieutenant. Tomorrow morning you may have fifteen minutes with the CyberChief. I will arrange matters that if he cares to allow you additional time, there will be a half hour following your period into which he can run over. Be here at—" he checked his memo pad "—be here at 0805." He smiled wanly and added, "Good luck, Lieutenant, and I hope you're right."

"Thank you, sir," Kurt said. He swung on his heel and marched toward the door, his stomach empty in the fear that the other would call him back and change his mind.

THAT night at the mini-apt he varied things. For one, the almost fantastically rare bottle of earth-side champagne, awarded him by Doctr Gail and the Commodore as a result of the wager they'd made on his being able to get the interview, decorated the servo-table instead of the usual Side-Cars. For another, the dinner hadn't come from the community kitchen. A roast chicken, which had cost him a half month's pay, graced the table.

The decontaminator hummed. He waited, dead panned, in his usual position.

Nadine entered in her bird-like, darting manner, and headed for the refresher. She shot a glance at the table, continued on her way, then shot it another unbelieving look, then one at him.

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"Kurt!" she squealed.

He grinned at her as she spun around and hurried to the table.

"Chicken! Real chicken! And—and champagne. Oh, Kurt, you made it. You're going to see the Cyber-Chief."

He still grinned.

"Oh, Kurt, you've won. This'll mean promotion for you." She came into his arms. Then, looking up worriedly, "If this project you speak of will be as successful as you say."

He said softly, "More than an ordinary promotion, darling. I'll be *promoted* to civilian clothes."

She looked at him, surprise and questioning in her eyes. "What do you mean, Kurt?"

He hesitated. "I shouldn't have said that, Nadine. Not even to you. Let's forget it and enjoy our celebration. Tomorrow you'll probably know all about it."

THE office of the CyberSupCom lay beyond that of Harri Kristn. In distance, his desk was approximately a hundred feet from that of the WASC who sat outside the office of Kristn. It was a hundred feet in distance, it had taken Kurt more than a month to make it. He was sitting in the reception hall before 0730 the following morning trying to control the tic in his eye.

At 0803 the WASC said, "Lieutenant Rand."

He came to his feet and hurried toward the door.

Harri Kristn looked up only briefly from the papers he was studying. He nodded, then gestured with his head at an inner door. Rand crossed the room briskly—every second counted—and twisted the knob.

He came to attention within the other office, and snapped a salute to the heavy-set man at the desk. The other looked up at him, scowled peevishly, and said to his secretary, "Who in *kert* is this, Captain?" His voice held a petulant growl.

His secretary said, "Lieutenant Kurt Rand, sir. PropCorps. According to Mr. Kristn, the PropCorps claims to have developed a secret method—"

"I know, I know," he snorted, "a secret method of ending the war in —how long, Lieutenant? —three weeks, a month?" He made no effort to disguise the insulting tone.

Kurt Rand said, "A period of several months, sir. Certainly less than a year."

"The Propaganda Corps, eh? I've become used to using the Master-Cyber for finding the holes in fantastic schemes concocted by the BacterCorps, the RadCorps, and especially the FissCorps; but now we get the PropCorps. What in the name of *Wodo* did Kristn mean by letting you in here to take up my time?"

His secretary said easily, "Sir, although we don't know *why* Harri Kristn has thought it worth your while for you to spend fifteen minutes with the Lieutenant, you've

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trusted Mr. Kristn's judgment for a long time."

He turned and glared at her. "Captain," he snapped. "*I* shall decide—" His eyes softened, and some of the characteristic peevishness went away from his mouth, and he said, "Very well, Nadine; you are quite correct." He cleared his throat heavily. "I note, by the way, that the Lieutenant's name is Kurt Rand. Is there any relationship here, Captain?"

Nadine's little chin came up infinitesimally, "He is my husband, sir."

"Oh?" The CyberChief's eyes went from one to the other. "And you've made no effort to help him through your connections with me?" There was no answer. He seemed impressed. "All right, Lieutenant, let's have your story. Tell me why the PropCorps thinks it should have access to the MasterCyber. I warn you in advance that there is less than one chance in a thousand; as always we are months behind in our work."

Kurt Rand stepped forward earnestly, dropping his military pose. He took a chair across the desk from the CyberChief and leaned forward. "Sir, for background, let me do a brief review of the situation that applies today."

The CyberSupCom looked at his desk chronom even as he shrugged his beefy shoulders. "You have thirteen more minutes, use them as you will, Lieutenant."

"Sir, the Two Hundred Years War, as they are already beginning to call it, was a cold war, at first. Neither Mars nor our own planet were able to do much in the way of attacking each other. But, as the decades went by, inter-planetary warfare developed. During the same period all the planets and satellites of the Solar System were drawn into the conflict on one side or the other —Venus, of course, excepted. Only Venus of all the settled planets and satellites has remained completely aloof."

The CyberChief growled petulantly, "The cowardly *makrons*—if they would only come in on our side, as they should, this stalemate could be broken and the war would be over."

"Exactly, sir," Kurt told him with satisfaction.

The other stared at him, belligerently. "You mean the PropCorps claims to have worked out a method of bringing Venus into the war on our side?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, don't sit there holding it, you fool! What is it?"

"A little more background first, sir, if you don't mind. One of the factors which has contributed most strongly to the balance of power between Mars and her allies and Earth and hers, has been the fact that we've both utilized a MasterCyber, the superbrain. Both sides submit their important problems to

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the MasterCyber and receive correct replies. It is impossible for the MasterCyber to make a mistake. And, of course, that is what makes your position, as CyberSupCom, the most important in Earth's forces."

"What in *kert* are you trying to do, young man, tell me about my own job? Get to the point! I know all there is to know about the MasterCyber and its importance."

"Yes, sir," Rand said doggedly, and ignoring the other. "To go on, the MasterCyber has every bit of human knowledge ever accumulated. It can draw upon this endless knowledge to —"

The CyberChief gritted his teeth. "Yes, yes—and the Martian MasterCyber has it all too. We are perfectly counterbalanced, so the war drags on. What *is* your point, Lieutenant?"

Krut Rand let his eyes go from the CyberChief to Nadine, and then back again. This was it. "Sir, the MasterCyber is incapable of error. We of the PropCorps suggest that the following problem be fed into it: WHAT WOULD BE THE IDEAL PROPAGANDA TO CONVINCE THE VENUSIANS THAT OUR SIDE IS IN THE RIGHT AND TO PERSUADE THEM TO ENTER THE WAR IN OUR SUPPORT?"

The CyberChief slumped back into his swivel chair, his eyes wide. He said nothing for a full five minutes.

Rand broke in finally. "It is common knowledge that with the forces of Venus aligned with ours, the war would be terminated in months. In fact, the Martians and their allies would probably surrender upon the entry of the Venusians to our ranks."

The other growled hesitantly, "But we've never put that type of problem into the MasterCyber. It—"

Rand insisted, leaning forward excitedly in his chair. "But why not? Why is its ability limited to devising new weapons, new bacteriological warfare methods, new gases, faster space-drives? Remember, sir, that it has *all* of the knowledge of the human race; it is incapable of making error."

The CyberChief had not reached his position of authority by accident. He snapped to Nadine, "Captain, have Major Waltrs and Colonel Crewsn up immediately. Have the machine cleared of whatever problem it presently contains within the half hour."

As Nadine flicked to work, he turned back to Kurt. "To what extent is this restricted? How many of the PropCorps are—"

"There are three of us, sir—only three, Doctor Gail, Commodore McComas and myself."

The CyberChief's eyes, hard now and infinitely alert, went back to Nadine. "Have them placed in immediate seclusion, Captain. Under no circumstances are they to have any conversation whatsoever with

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anyone except myself. Captain, Lieutenant, you two are not to leave these offices until further instructions. We have quarters we can provide for you. There must be no leak on this."

THEY stood before the typer of the MasterCyber; the CyberSupCom, Colonel Crewsn, the binary authority, Major Waltrs, cybernetics engineer, Captain Nadine Rand, secretary of the CyberSupCom, and Lieutenant Kurt Rand of the PropCorps. The last two stood closely together, their hands clasped unobtrusively.

"Darling," she breathed to him. "If it works, if it *only* works."

He said softly, grimly, "It *has* to. It's the end of the war, Nadine. A return to real life; to homes, to children, to ambitions and goals . . ."

Colonel Crewsn had punched up the cards himself—all other personnel had been cleared from the large, ultra-fortified underground building which housed the most important weapon in the arsenal of Earth and its allies. Crewsn, his face as tense as those of the others, placed the cards in the machine's hopper.

The CyberChief touched the start button with a heavy, trembling finger and the cards fed rapidly into the maw of the MasterCyber.

"It shouldn't take too long," the engineer muttered.

It didn't. The typer reset, spaced up two spaces on the endless roll of white paper which fed into it, and began to stutter.

They watched it, white faced and tense.

It typed:

QUESTION: WHAT WOULD BE THE IDEAL PROPAGANDA TO CONVINCE THE VENUSIANS THAT OUR SIDE IS IN THE RIGHT AND TO PERSUADE THEM TO ENTER THE WAR IN OUR SUPPORT?"

ANSWER: NO ANSWER POSSIBLE.

Rand's eye ticked uncontrollably. The CyberSupCom snapped his teeth together.

Major Waltrs said unbelievingly. "But that's impossible. Such an answer is impossible."

Colonel Crewsn growled some profanity and returned to his key punch. He began punching up more cards angrily.

Kurt Rand hadn't moved. He stared down at the words on the white paper as though they held some deep meaning but as though he lacked the ability to read.

The others remained silent, too, until Crewsn's return.

The binary expert put his new cards in the MasterCyber's hopper and jabbed the start button viciously. "This is the best chance I've ever seen for ending this damned war," he growled. "There's no reason why this super-brain can't do it."

The typer reset, spaced up two more spaces and began to type. It

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wrote:

QUESTION: WHY IS NO ANSWER POSSIBLE TO THE QUESTION: WHAT WOULD BE THE IDEAL PROPAGANDA TO CONVINCE THE VENUSIANS THAT OUR SIDE IS IN THE RIGHT AND TO PERSUADE THEM TO ENTER THE WAR IN OUR SUPPORT?

ANSWER: YOUR SIDE IS NOT IN THE RIGHT.

THE END

THIS special section of OTHER WORLDS is for your own participation and enjoyment. Here you will find your letters to the editor; your jokes (for which we will pay $1 each); your personal messages to your fellow readers (published free); reviews of science fiction books worthy of your attention; the latest news of what's going on in he world of authors, editors, rival magazines, fan clubs, even individual readers; your bookshop; cartoons; fact articles; interviews with individuals in the public eye and many others. If you have any suggestions as to improvements and additional features, remember your word is our golden rule.

THE FIFTY DOLLAR ANSWER

IN the October 1951 issue of OTHER WORLDS we asked a question. We asked you readers what was going on on the cover. You see, we'd forgotten to have story written for the cover, and to cover up our mistake, we offered to pay $50.00 to the reader who could tell us what that story might have been about. Well, here's the answer (the one we thought worth the $50.00 payment), plus a few others that we present for the interest they may have.

We're mighty glad we asked that question. It proved to us once again that we're never too old to learn. What we learned about you readers that will help us in the future to give you better stories is almost amazing. Believe us, we want to thank all those who answered the question, and we wish we could give them all $50.00 for their cooperation! It was well worth it.

Probably equally amazing was the response. We received more answers than for any contest ever run in science fiction before! It was definite proof that we're on the right track, and that we've got more friends then ever before in our long career as editor-friend of the average science fiction reader.

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First off, we'll mention a few of the answers we did not pay $50.00 for. We'll reserve the winner until last for a definite reason. So don't peek at the end, will you? Just read on through these first answers, many of which will give you quite a kick, and a laugh or two.

It was funny how many readers linked the cover to a Shaver theme. For instance, take *George R. Harth,* of Rt. 3, The Dalles, Oregon. He wrote: "Instantly recognized your cover. A young Elder exploring the ruins of the caves on Earth, gathering information on DE worlds, as all young Elders must, doubts the degenerates' story of hidden mech. Though ray covered, this work is dangerous. But heck, ask Shaver, he can tell you about it!"

Then there was *Vernard M. Eller,* 22 S. State Street, Elgin, Illinois, who said: "The cover of your October issue is obvious. Ed Gaedel, bat still in hand, has finally found a champion for his cause, a lady, of course, and if the fire in her eyes is any measure of her determination, the year 2307 will go down in history as the reinstatement of midgets into major league baseball!" Of course we all remember the hilarious incident last baseball season when a midget actually went to bat in an effort to draw a walk in the Big Leagues. The idea was it would be hard for a pitcher to put the ball over for a strike with so little distance between knee and shoulder. It was!

On an intellectual plane, there was the answer of *B. Coursin Black,* 1216 64th St. S. W., Byron Center, Michigan. "*Present humanity,* colossally mighty, in yellow of regal power, holds warped Caduceus (Power, Wisdom, Activity). The red of *Material Force* expressed through the gun. *Primitive Man* urges force. Behind Art's broken pillar, *Intellectual Man* sorrowfully contemplates Tragic Futurity. Revolted yet fascinated by Primitive Urgings, Present Humanity inscrutably poises for action."

Says Don Willson, No. Reading State Sanitorium, No. Wilmington, Mass., "The girl, representing the editor, is so dressed in order to lure unsuspecting readers to the magazine so that the circulation department can hustle them into the back room or wherever editors of stf mags are allowed to hang out. The little men represent the authors of the stories. Their beards of wisdom are obviously false, implying the total lack of any wisdom at all, especially a lack of fundamentals of the English language, as any editor can testify. They are pointing to a new reader and the club will doubtless be used to "persuade" said reader that OW is a fine magazine. The girl is tall and wears a frown because she looks down on the mere dirt of the authors. The gun is for the editor to use when his conscience finally catches up to him for not putting

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staples in the magazine and for not paying his managing editor Bea Mahaffey enough money for the work she does." Now we know where Bea got the idea to ask for a raise, under the threat of putting coffee in your editor's poison!

The following is very typical of several very typical themes, which were almost duplicated word for word by hundreds of readers: *J. E. Morin,* 120 S. W. 36th Ave., Miami, Florida, said: "The place, Venus. Time, the year 2075. Venus because of its apparent continuous warm climate as indicated by the costumes on the characters. The woman is from Earth, which, by the year indicated would be far enough advanced in science to justify her costume and weapon. The primitive, but friendly and peaceful nation of the dwarfmen have adopted the Earthwoman as their Queen, who is receiving directions from the dwarfmen as to the position of the enemy tribe of Venusians who have just attacked their stronghold, leaving heavy destruction."

Another typical answer was that given by *Richard B. Crawford,* 36 Crawford Ct., Walnut Creek, California. (Say, Richard, do you *really* own Crawford Ct?) "The girl is a spacetime explorer and special deputy peace officer. She has been commissioned to seek out and bring to justice a criminal of her own culture who has come to this remote time-place and misused his powers to reduce the inhabitants to this pitiable state."

Mrs. S. A. White, Box 36, Parksley, Va., strikes still a third typical note: "Descendents of the ten who escaped to Mars before the final atomic war on Earth have come back to the mother planet. Living in the ancient ruins, Myra finds a race of ratlike, dwarfed humans, who worship her as a golden goddess. A hostile tribe is attacking to gain her possession."

Chortles *G. E. McDowell,* Henagar, Alabama, "He went thataway!"

Comments *Paul Johnson,* Rt. 2, Perkins, Oklahoma: "The young lady is mad because some jerk stole fifty bucks from her purse."

Harlan Ellison, 12701 Shaker Blvd., Apt. 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio, has another theory: "The girl is a psychotic pre-clear who is looking for her auditor who, she has just found out, is a swindler, and has run off with her family silverware while she was in the middle of a pain incident (being squirted in the face by juice from a grapefruit). The two little creeps are engrams pointing the way to Grandma's house, Granny being a file clerk in disguise."

Says Ione S. Bloodworth, Rt. 1, Box 344, College Park, Maryland: "The Nibelung dwarfs, still guarding Rheingold under age-old thrall and bewailing its tediums, adopt a toddling fugitive from bombings, whose baby trust delights them.

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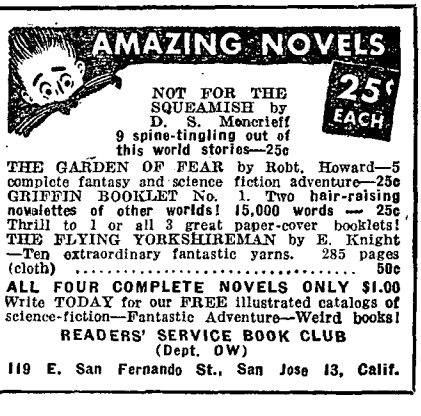
They name her Aurea, clothe her in woven gold, and as she grows up, teach her to abhor men, who always destroy. Armed and escorted by dwarfs, Aurea, exploring a ruin, encounters men likewise engaged. The Nibelungs, restrained by ancient doom from harming men until Gotterdammerung, urged her to repel the intruders. Curious, Aurea demurs—"

Nelson Bridewell, 120 N.W. 29th Oklahoma City 3, Oklahoma, says: "The girl is Zno-Wigt, princess of the planet Grimma, who has fled to Ka-Tun, a ruined city in the domain of the emperor, Waltiz-Ni, to escape the wrath of her stepmother, the Queen Wikkeda. The little men are Duaffs, of the race that inhabits Ka-Tun. These are Doq and Groum-Pi, two of the seven who took Zno-Wigt in. They are pointing at the trail of Wikkeda, which they picked up after Prince Cha-Ming arrived to revive Zno-Wigt from a coma induced by a poisoned pomegranite which the Queen slipped her."

All of which brings us to *Claude Hall,* Box 611, Winters, Texas, to whom we are giving that $50.00 bill for his answer to our cover question.

"The girl is from the year 2357. The little men are both from the advanced but decadent future of 9893. The three have been trapped in a Time whirlpool where over the years have accumulated various items, scenes and personages out of history. For instance, in the swirl around them they see the wall of a twentieth-century building, some of the snow and ice from the Ice Age, an old Roman column from a long fallen building of that age, a curtain of red lava from the Earth's beginning, etc. Durg, the little man at the right of the girl, has picked up a club from the caveman era. He's slightly daffy from the strain of the strange land they are in; he is pointing and laughing at the sight of still another helpless victim in Time's whirlpool. The girl has a gun, not knowing what to expect from the newcomer in this weird place. She scowls at Durg when she sees it is a handsome man who steps out of the swirling mists of Time. The girl, the two little future men, and the handsome man have many adventures before they are able to escape from the pool to their rightful place in Time."

Now, here we go again. We will pay $50.00 to the reader who writes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us the best letter selecting a professional writer to write this story for OTHER WORLDS and the reasons for his or her selection. Who is the man, or woman, to write this story? Why? You tell us, and we'll get that writer to do your bidding! And we'll pay you $50.00 for your advice! Hop to it, readers. No telling how far this $50.00 business will go before we're through!

Send your letter to: EDITORIAL ADVICE, OTHER WORLDS Science Stories, 1144 Ashland Avenue, Evanston, Illinois.

* * *

THE MAN FROM TOMORROW

AN analysis of the predictions given to readers of OTHER WORLDS by the strange method I outlined in the January issue reveals that there were 37 individual predictions. It is my purpose to "keep score" on these predictions, listing total predictions, those which turn out to be correct, those which are as yet undetermined and those which are definitely wrong. Some of these predictions, because of their long-range character, must remain in the undetermined category, except where they seem to be occurring progressively, such as a long-range weather prediction. Although the first series of predictions was written on October 10, 1951, and this month's series written on November 12, the score includes the following:

(1) The weather, especially dating from October 30 to November 8, became exceptionally freakish. In many areas, all-time records were set for both cold and precipitation. (2) The weather became a top news topic, and there were many conflicting statements by meteorologists. The man in the street agreed "it was a mess." One enterprising newscaster even dared Pentagon Perusal by saying "the recent atom tests might have something to do with this exceptionally bad weather." (3) In spite of the positive prediction of statisticians that the 1951 crop would be the second greatest in history resulting in surplus reserves, October wrote finis to that prediction and forced revision to America's third best crop. Instead of surplus, there will be shortage, even "dangerously short" reserves of corn and wheat and other grains. (4) America will not be able to ship as much food to hunger-ridden nations as she had planned. (5) The October rains were blamed on the "rainmakers" and suits against them were instituted by angry farmers in the far west whose crops were ruined. (6) October weather, which caused the loss of 19,000,000 bushels of corn, and an unestimated (as yet) amount of spoilage through freezing, came coincidentally with new atomic bomb tests.

The score thus far for "The Man

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From Tomorrow" is as follows:

Correct—6.
Undetermined—31.
Accuracy—100%.

Too little time has passed to render the feats of this mysterious entity very impressive. Yet in the single instance of the abrupt revision on November 8 of the 1951 crop analysis, the impact on history becomes more than trivial. Implied in such a prediction by my mysterious "mental" voice are many predictions which would serve to increase the total number of these predictions, but primarily interest is in *wrong* totals, not correct ones. One wrong prediction throws great doubt on the claims that are being made here. That food prices will rise in the next six months *because* of this crop damage is axiomatic. That more foreign people will starve *because* of it, is also axiomatic. That price-wage increase contracts will undergo further spiraling is obvious. That strikes will ensue in the process of bringing about these wage increases is apparent. In all these, we find a rising score in favor of the "man from tomorrow". But, I repeat, impressive as these facts will be, I am interested *more* in a wrong prediction. I request that readers who become aware of an error in these predictions, contact me immediately with the facts in the instance.—Rap.

Predictions this month will be based first on the question of atomic energy. During the next six months, several new series of tests will be inaugurated. Each series will cause a weather catastrophe of a disturbingly violent and "unseasonable" nature. There will be an alarming number of earthquakes, several of them of major classification. Especially will there be devastating tornado and cyclone activity.

Russian atom-bomb experiments will get top publicity in this country. One of them will *occur* in February. Publicity will be delayed.

Linked with, although not directly attributed to atomic secrets, will be an increasing turmoil regarding freedom of speech. Newspapers and magazines and radio and television news disseminating agencies will wax eloquent over increased security regulations and suppression of "free" news under a threat of intimidation, such intimidation being in the implied cutting off of newsprint supplies by the simple expedient of "armed forces priorities" which will dry up paper sources for "obstinate editors". Such priorities will not actually be utilized in this manner, but the *fear* of them will cause much involuntary news suppression, and much editorial comment and criticism will be left unprinted.

A new type atomic weapon will be devised which will be tested before the end of 1952 which will make possible the claim that atomic weapons can be produced *cheaper* than any other type of large-scale weapon, such as tanks, planes, big

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guns, rockets, etc. Also that quantity will no longer be limited and production-line capacity is a reality.

Atomic power plants will be greatly advanced and in many areas of the country, especially in critically-short power areas such as the Pacific Northwest, atom power plants will be designed and planned, and actual construction will start in 1953-54.

The advance into medicine of atomic science will be tremendous, and the use of atomic substances in radioactive form will be stepped up so that great danger will exist of too much usage without proper experimentation to determine possible harmful results. There will be instances of harmful results. There will also be miraculous beneficial results. These latter will be largely in the advance of knowledge of physiological processes rather than in cures. In short, atomic medicine will bring into being for the first time, *preventative* medicine. In 1952, many of these things will cast their shadow before them.

In the field of meteorology, there will be a baffling increase in the number of socalled "sky mysteries". Gigantic flashes, called meteorites, although no meteorites will be recovered, or fragments thereof, which can definitely be linked to the strange flashes. These flashes will occur increasingly during and after atomic bomb tests. They will occur in the upper atmosphere, soundlessly, in tremendous effect.

The new "hallucination" will be spaceships seen in space, especially near the moon. Reputable astronomers will make guarded reports of "objects" but rumor will flare widely that they mean "ships".

It will be discovered that the Earth has a faint ring similar to that of Saturn, although much less visible.

There will be a disappointing lack of new discovery by the giant 200 in. telescope at Palomar. It will be found that the Universe does not seem to have any limits even at the fullest extent reachable by the giant eye. The theory that the Universe is expanding will be completely discredited when the socalled "red-shift" is determined to be due to an electro-magnetic phenomenon.

Gravitation, as such, will be found to be non-existent. It is actually a manifestation of disturbances in electro-magnetic fields caused by the presence of matter and not any property in the matter itself.

In the field of politics, Harry S. Truman will be elected the next president of the United States. He will serve out his full term and will be credited with being the greatest of all American Presidents. He will bring about a degree of "capitalism-socialism" which will actually be more socialistic than capitalistic. Money power groups will lose tremendously in the coming battle of politico-socialism versus profit-taking and banking control. Price-fixing

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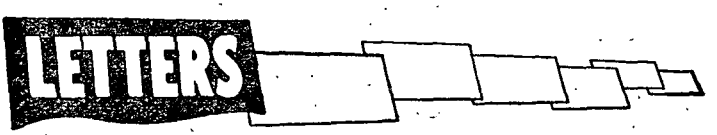
will be the word, but not the actuality.

There will be growing changes in "civil liberties" and much argument concerning the meaning of the term. Nationalism will override many individual "liberties" although these nationalisms will be termed "liberties" in the sense that they are "privileges". Americans will be the most privileged group in the world, privileged even to retain their "liberty". But "leisure time" devoted to intellectual pursuits, arts, sciences (outside atomic science), philosophy, music, will be more and more curtailed. *Fear* will cloud Americans' concepts of human rights. *Necessity* will be the excuse behind the fear.

THE END



KENT COREY

I have just finished reading your October issue. It was one of the best OTHER WORLDS I have read. This is how I rated them:

1. Lightning Over Saturn—Excellent.

2. A Matter of Perspective—Good.

3. The End Of Science Fiction—Good.

4. Journey To Nowhere—Good.

5. No Approach—Fair.

6. Music From Down Under—Well . . .

And the articles were fair. Now on to Shaver. I think he is the best writer (next to Geier and Phillips) in the world! The stories he has put out are tops. His best was "Earth Slaves To Space" in September '46 AS. I have been reading and collecting SF for four months, but in that short time I have collected 111 magazines.

I like OW and Madge because of trimmed edges and digest size. They fit in so nice in my bookcase. And for that October cover, it ought to be, "He went thataway". As you see, I read *Marvel SF* too!

I would like to hear from other fans.

Box 64,
Enid, Oklahoma.

Darn it, we wanted to put that title on the cover "He Went Thataway" ourselves! We got a real chuckle out of the idea, but somehow our staff didn't go for the idea. —Rap.

EDWARD JOSEPH McEVOY

This is the first letter of great praise that you will get from me, and I hope there will be more. What I want to express is my thanks for the fact that you have brought Richard S. Shaver back into writing. I am waiting to see more book lengths like his "Gods Of Venus", in large

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installments, in your magazine. He is truly a great author and I hope that you do not go back on your word by not printing his novels. Remember his "Daughter Of The Night"? Well, how about a sequel (novel size)? I am sure that the readers would be very pleased. The other reason I write is to tell you that I fully agree with you for giving us 100,000 word novels and I hope there will be many. Believe me, I wouldn't mind a bit if there was only ONE story on the contents page. Wishing you lots of good luck and hoping you stick to your word—I am sure it was a promise.

5460 43rd St.,
Maspeth 78, N. Y.

We won't go back on our word. However, we don't present authors, only stories. The story is the thing. If Shaver writes a sequel to Daughter of the Night, you'll get it, if it's tops! As for long novels, rest easy—you'll get them!—Rap.

DORIS B. SAUNDERS

Yesterday I was *lucky* enough to find the December issue of OW on the newsstand. I've been *haunting* it, as this is my second issue of OW and the second science fiction magazine I've ever read, although *why*, I'll never know. *What* I've been missing all these years! I noticed your magazine on account of the Flying Saucer story. Anything pertaining to Saucers makes my blood race. Well, I devoured the first installment, then had to wait six weeks, which nearly killed me! But when I read the conclusion yesterday, I felt stunned. Never have I felt so gripped by anything. I had to stop reading several times and just sit still, as though I were spellbound. I can't shake the feeling that the *whole* thing is true! Well, I've written too much already. But let me express my appreciation for this story and for your wonderful magazine. All the stories were most enjoyable and gave me many hours of pleasure. It is going to be hard waiting for the January issue—Kenneth Arnold's true facts on the saucers. Oh boy!

20 Hillside,
San Anselmo, Calif.

No, the whole flying saucer story isn't true. But half of it is. And who knows how close to being true the fictional parts are? Maybe someday we'll find out we've next-door neighbors in space we never dreamed about.—Rap.

LONNY LUNDE,

This is my first letter to a magazine since becoming a fan last spring, but undoubtedly it won't be my last.

To introduce myself, I am 11 years old, and have been one of radio's Quiz Kids since I was eight.

I was very interested in your fran discussion of the relative merits of s-f magazines in your Decembe editorial. My own favorite is AS with OTHER WORLDS close be hind it. I am sorry, however, tha you did not mention *Thrilling Won*

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der Stories, which I consider vastly superior to *Amazing Stories*.

OTHER WORLDS, as a whole, is very good. I only have one complaint. That is that OW has its own select group of writers; people like Bloch, Shaver, Palmer and Phillips. All have written some very good stories, but the magazine would have more variety if it contained an occasional tale by Leinster, Bradbury, van Vogt, or Pratt. The stories by Brown and Russell in the September issue were very welcome.

Now to the ratings of the October issue:

1. Music From Down Under—A very good idea well written.
2. No Approach — An interesting situation and very logical.
3. The End of Science Fiction—Certainly an off-the-beaten-path story. One of the best of Bloch's stories.
4. A Matter of Perspective — Not bad.
5. Journey To Nowhere—A pretty good tale, but a rather obvious ending.
6. Lightning Over Saturn—Two stories by Shaver in one issue is at least one too many.

All in all, a very good issue.

The only thing that I have read in the December issue (except the conclusion to the Flying Saucer serial) is Quandary, undoubtedly one of the most illogical stories that I have read. At least it was short. I hope that the other stories in the issue are better.

One more thing; keep up the articles on the inside covers. The article on Merritt was very fine as was the spread on you.

306 Elmore Ave.,
Park Ridge, Ill.

We're happy to hear from one of the Quiz Kids. And you bring up a few points we must answer. First, we don't have our own select group of writers. For instance, we consistently run several of ASF's better writers, under other names, for a good reason. ASF is quite reluctant to let other magazines capitalize on their writers, or on their stories. They do not release reprint rights to anthologies, for example. Also, we have run at least Bradbury and van Vogt on quite a few occasions. That was before you began reading us. We'll have them again. And the others you mention, when we manage to get them. We're always trying . . .

And we do regret failing to mention Thrilling Wonder Stories. It is a darn good magazine all around, and we'd say it was the best example today for general excellence. It's well edited in every way.—Rap.

JOE GIBSON

Uh *huh!* So Don Wilson's the lad who came up with it, eh? Spotted his letter in the December OW immediately.

Don, m'lad, I was waiting for you. Naturally, you're right: saying Yin

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Chao-tang and Wu Chao-tang were brothers was like saying Jimmy Jones and Jimmy Smith are brothers—according to present Chinese custom, which places family names first. Of course, I could wriggle out of it easily, by saying: "But MISTY MOUNTS was set in the twenty-*second* century—" and there'd be no point in arguing. But I'd like an opinion on this.

Consider: today, China is suffering possibly the bloodiest era in her entire history. If a Chinese is born into the upper middle-class, or has the wrong relatives, he dies. If he sneezes at the wrong time, he dies. If a parent reproves an erring child, and that child runs and tells the police certain things—thus the family name in China is becoming MUD. Or so go thousands of reports heard in Hong Kong, from thousands of Chinese.

I don't pretend to know how this present situation will resolve itself; I can hope, though. So, in the 22nd century, I had the Earth with a uniformly high standard of living, with fast transport and super communications, with industrial centers on the Arctic Circle within shortest air-freight distance of world markets. And Asia was great again, prosperous again.

Sometime in between, I could see U. N. relief teams working day and night in China, struggling to save starving millions, to stop famines, to resurrect a great people. And with a new, infant economy and industry climbing out of the ruins, there would probably be the usual "foreign" exploiters, coming in to make a fast buck—but it seemed to me that the Asiatics might beat those few exploiters at their own game. So Asia might take her place as a strong partner in the progress of mankind.

And somewhere in there, it seemed to me that a lot of Wong Chao-Li's would hear themselves addressed not as Mr. Wong, which is proper, but as Mr. Chao-Li, which is like calling Palmer Mr. Raymond. Y'see, in the *western* world, the family name comes last—

So a smart merchant in Chungking, chatting with air-freight buyers from all over the world, might well introduce himself as Mr. Chao-Li. Especially if he's more interested in putting his kids through college than in respecting traditions which would've made him a starving rice farmer.

You may not agree with this supposition, but I haven't noticed any Chinese-Americans calling themselves Mr. Wu James or Mr. Chan Charles. I don't mean to imply any disrespect to anyone, either. After all, were the conditions reversed, then Jimmy Jones and Jimmy Smith might well be brothers two centuries from now!

So that's my explanation for Yin and Wu Chao-Tang—and the reason I also capitalized the second half

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of the second name. To me, it makes sense. But it wouldn't have added anything to the story, so I left it out.

24 Kensington Ave.,
Jersey City, N. J.

P.S.—Bea Mahaffey, don't you dast breathe a *word* about that two-thousand-year blunder!

Okay, Joe. Guess this clears you with our "purist" reader. And we do hope your picture of future China is a true one.—Rap.

MARK JOHNSTON

I rated OW in the third class on the October issue, and was understandably shocked to find that I had to advance it to the second-class after reading your December issue. If you keep on like this, I'll be making regular trips across the border to get your mag.

I hope you are going to stand by your promise you made in your October issue to Doug Mitchell. Here's why.

1. Act Of God is an "A" story, and I don't let myself classify many that high.
2. The Personals are unique and valuable. I intend using them myself soon.
3. The editorials, both official and in answer to letters, read like personal letters to us. You are talking to us throughout, and that is good.

Any Canadian fan who doesn't know what CSFA stands for, should write to me at once.

250,000 words? If you can write it, we can read it, but make it fit the formula you mentioned, because I for one cannot hope to get every installment. You should distribute OW in Windsor.

433 Askin Blvd.,
Windsor, Ont.,Can.

We're working OW into Canada gradually. We are now on sale in Toronto, Edmonton, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver and Winnipeg. We'll add Windsor and several others very soon. Eventually we expect to be distributed throughout Canada.—Rap.

LOWELL HOWARD

I am a new reader of science fiction, and I do want to congratulate you on putting out such a fine magazine. I like your new idea of putting out longer stories, however I do not like serials. I really don't think I'll mind, though, as long as they are as good as they are now.

I thought your lead off story in the December issue, "Act Of God" was of very high merit. In fact, I didn't find one story in this issue that I wouldn't consider tops.

I enjoyed your serial "I Flew In A Flying Saucer" very much. I do believe that there are such things, and I hope you have more stories in them. I noticed that the October FATE had articles on them too. How about it, do you believe in them?

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I want you to know that as long as you keep putting in such fine stories and authors in OTHER WORLDS as you have, I will always be a loyal customer of your magazine.

32-06 47th Street,
Long Island City 3, NY.

Our "long" story policy and our "serial" policy are not policy. We are merely interested in running the best stories we can get—and that makes for problems. So, each issue we try to balance up the issue so that we can avoid running even a fair story to fill out the pages. If the only way we can do it is serially, we do it. So, you'll never know what to expect—we might have a 30,000 word story in two parts, or we might run a 55,000 worder complete! But we'll be darned if we ever again put in a short because "that exactly fills out our pages"! We'd rather run blank pages than a bad story. We want to deserve that loyalty you mention!

Flying saucers? Do we believe in them? Well, if you read the January issue, you know we KNOW they exist. We're hotter than a firecracker to be the first to present one to our readers. And if we get one, you can bet we'll print the facts! If there's anything we hate, it's a lying official. We elect 'em, and we expect them to tell the truth, or shut up! But we won't tolerate lies. We recognize their right to keep quiet, and that's what we ask them to do if they intend trying to make fools of us with a trumped up story like Liddell's balloons. How stupid do they think we are? And how much do they think such a silly story influences us? If it was a CLEVER lie, there'd be some excuse. But an IDIOTIC one . . . Bah!—Rap.

PERSONALS

Stf readers and collectors: Here's your chance to obtain a copy of the extremely rare January 1941 BIZARRE, pre-war printed fanzine. Contains material by Lovecraft, Merritt, Campbell, E. E. Smith and Bok. Limited supply available at $1.00 each. Don Ford, Box 116, Sharonville, Ohio . . . *Would like the names and addresses of any dianetics groups in the Ft. Wayne area and addresses of any dianetics publications anywhere. S. E. Stuart II, 2632 Culbertson, Ft. Wayne, Ind.* . . . A. Charles Catania, 620 W. 182 St., N.Y. 33, N.Y. wants pb DUNWICH HORROR and Bradbury's DARK CARNIVAL with d/w. Will buy or trade . . . *For sale: August 16, 1892 issue of The Popular Series of Choice Novels. Published by Crawford & Co., con-*

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tains H. Rider Haggard's SHE. Loaded with foot-notes. Back cover missing. Will accept highest offer. David Ross, Frederica, Del. . . . Will pay 50c per copy for Mag of Fantasy and Stf, Vol. 1, No. 1 & 2 in mint condition. Douglas Mitchell, Ste. 11-406 Notre Dame Ave., Winnipeg, Man., Canada . . . *Pvt. Stan Serxner, US* 51112553, *A Btry,* 23 *AAA, AW* Bn (*Sp*), *8th Inf. Div., Ft. Jackson, S. Car. wants to correspond with stf fans or femmes in or out of the service.* . . . Will buy copies of UNKNOWN and aSF prior to '44 at 75c each. Dave Fried, 15 East Hoover, Phoenix, Arizona . . . *Anne Roth,* 5024 *16th Ave., Brooklyn* 4, *N.Y. is* 16 *years old, has been a fan for* 4 *years. Wants to correspond with teen-age fans* . . . Wanted: Issue No. 2 of FATE. Must be in good condition. Will pay reasonable price. Jim Parry, R.D. No. 1, Taft Rd., East Syracuse, N.Y. . . . *Wish to obtain early issues of OW, pre '45 FFM, aSF and Unknown. Will buy or trade. Alfred W. Purdy,* 1846 *W. 2nd Ave., Vancouver* 9, *B.C., Canada* . . . Any Denver fans interested in joining a fan club? We now have six members and will welcome more. Dennis Lee Hulbert, 1225 Detroit St., Denver, Colo. . . . *Will trade* 16*mm soundless movie projector with* 4 *movies for stf mags. Projector cost* $25.00. *Would also like to correspond with other fans. David Jewitt, E-*305 *East* 54*th Ave. Vancouver, Wash.* . . . I am the most lonely fan on Long Island. Want pen-pals about 15 or 16 years old. Roy Torgeson, 74 Park Ave., Oceanside, N.Y. . . . *Would like to hear from anyone who can tell me how to start a stf collection and how to become an actifan. Will answer all letters. Larry Walker,* 2367 *Wolcott, San Diego, Calif.* . . . Would like to trade back issues of British stf mags New Worlds and Science-Fantasy for back issues of OW & Madge. Will answer all replies. George Waller, 13 Francis Rd., Dartford, Kent, England . . . *Am collecting material for a mimeographed booklet "How To Form a Science-Fiction Club." Would like to hear from fans who have organized or belonged to fan clubs. Need the names, addresses, emblems, constitutions, etc. of such clubs. Orville W. Mosher III,* 1728 *Mayfair, Emporia, Kansas* . . . Joel Nydahl wants pen-pals about 13 years old, particularly those living near Marquette, Michigan. His address is 304 W. Washington St., Marquette, Michigan . . . *Can anyone tell me if there are any fan-clubs in Miami, Ft. Lauderdale or in the near neighberhood? Ron Scheib,* 2627 *Van Buren St., Hollywood, Fla.* . . . Need all 3 issues of The Amtorian, back issues of The Shaver Mystery Magazine and THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, Michael Egremont. Will buy or trade. Eldon K. Everett, P.O. Box 513, Tacoma, Wash. . . .

THE END

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The People Who Make OTHER WORLDS

No. 2. The Managing Editor

BEATRICE Mahaffey is somewhat of a newcomer when you consider that science-fiction is a field wherein devotees recall "the good old days" of fifteen and twenty years ago as casually as you might mention last week's occurrences.

She was born August 24, 1928. The place: Cincinnati, Ohio. Aided and abetted by an older brother she discovered Tarzan and Doc Savage at an early age, and moved on to science-fiction magazines at thirteen. Her first encounter with the pulps was through an early copy of *Fantastic Adventures.*

Despite the raised eyebrows of friends and relatives, she continued reading science-fiction and in 1949 she first became aware of organized fandom. This was the year of the Cinvention, and pre-convention publicity led her to join the sponsoring organization, The Cincinnati Fantasy Group.

This convention was a momentous occasion for Bea not only because it was the first one she attended, but because it was at the Cinvention that Ray Palmer announced that he was leaving Ziff-Davis to publish his own science-fiction magazine—OTHER WORLDS. Rap attended the Convention for 3 reasons: 1) conventions are fun, 2) he wanted to announce his new magazine, and 3) he needed help with the magazine and decided that a science-fiction fan would be the logical choice.

In October 1949—Monday 17th, to be exact—clutching the first issue of OTHER WORLDS in one hand and the letter accepting her application for the job in the other, Bea arrived at Clark Publishing Company to start work as a combination secretary and office manager. However, things didn't work out that way at all. Rap took a spill that landed him in the hospital for a long time and Bea was suddenly an editor, albeit with no warning and little experience. Now, a year and a half later, despite a few mishaps, Rap, OTHER WORLDS and Bea appear to have survived the catastrophe and are working together to bring you the best possible science-fiction entertainment.

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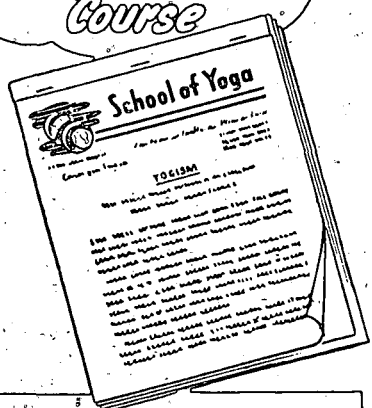

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